

NC

No. 5

ORBIT Science Fiction

# ORBIT

## Science Fiction

THE LAST OF  
THE MASTERS

by Philip K. Dick

James Causey, August Derleth,  
Gordon R. Dickson, Chad Oliver



No. 5 • 35¢

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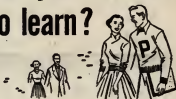
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# ORBIT

THE BEST IN

## Science Fiction

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# SCIENCE NOTES

As  
reported  
by  
SCIENCE SERVICE

**H**ARVARD University this fall started to train graduates in a new field, called "Data Processing," leading to the degree of Master of Science. Data processing concerns using automatic computing machinery, the so-called giant "brains," to work on industrial problems where storage and handling of large amounts of information are required.

In business, its aim is the automatic office, with customer billing and inventory control done entirely without human aid. Life insurance companies, large retail stores and public utilities are believed to be among those that could use digital computers for such functions to great advantage. In industry, data processing looks toward the day of the automatic control of factory operations. Chemical and oil industries have already made a start toward automation in this field.

The course is being started just ten years after the world's first automatic digital computer, Harvard's Mark I, was installed and dedicated. Scientists at the Computation Laboratory are currently investigating several different data processing applications, ranging from a study of Greek manuscripts of the New Testament to determine which were original and which were copied, to a detailed analysis of possible adaptations of the computer system to customer billing for a public utility company, to the possible design of an automatic dictionary for the Russian-English language. They are using both the ten-year-old Mark I and the more recently built Mark IV for these studies.

• •

**T**HE pull of gravity may have something to do with whether a primed athlete sets a new international record.

*(Continued on page 128)*

*These great minds were Rosicrucians.*



*Benjamin Franklin*



*Isaac Newton*



*Francis Bacon*

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# So Lovely, So Lost

*by James Causey*

**IN ANY AGE A PAGLIACCI MAY SING, AND EVEN AN**

**ANDROID LOVER MAY FIND HIMSELF LIVING AGAIN**

**THE TRAGIC-COMIC STORY OF THE CLOWN IN LOVE.**

**O**PENING NIGHT. The stage was starkly medieval, all sawdust and three rings and the glistening tightrope wires. From their cages beasts snarled and trumpeted. The ringmaster snapped his whip and bowed to the eight giant lenses that stared bleakly down. In back of those lenses was our audience. Sixty millions of audience, scattered throughout the hemisphere.

In the wings, Lisa trembled against me. I whispered, "Your cue."

She nodded, squeezed my hand.

The drums rolled.

Watching her move onstage, I wanted to cry. She was lovely. It was the way she moved like a hawk against the wind, the breathless lilt in her voice, the magic I'd taught her. Next to me, Paul Chanin grinned. "Nervous, Midge?"



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*Farquhar*

"No," I said. I'd never liked Paul. He was too smug, too sleekly handsome. I hadn't liked the way he'd been smiling at Lisa these last few days of rehearsal, or the way she'd smiled back. But Paul was good—for a human. He could do a one-armed *planche* on the high wire, he could cartwheel blindfolded over gleaming coals. And he could sing.

We went onstage together, Paul leaping lithe and splendid in crimson tights, me floundering clumsily after with my baggy pants and wistfully painted clown face, blowing kisses to the blazing arcs above, now weeping in mock fury as Paul made love to Lisa. Then I leaped thirty feet in the air and hung from the tightrope by my toes. A big smile. Midge the clown.

Sometimes you can tell when a show's going over. It was that way now. Right from the beginning I knew we had them by the throat. The banks of Emotional Reaction lights above the arcs told the story. They shone a clear deep ruby, a good healthy sign of audience empathy, but I wasn't surprised. Our play was a combination of two primitive art forms, and it had everything, love, pathos, beauty. And terror. The finale was the best, when the Zarl escaped from its cage and almost caught Lisa. I killed the Zarl, singing *Duo pro Pagliaccio* as I died, my voice golden thunder.

Curtain.

Director Latham hurried onstage,

clapping, his eyes wet with tears. "Splendid," he husked. "Magnificent, Midge! I think we've finally done it."

I squinted at the Reaction lights. They shone the steady crimson of approval. "Looks like a hit, sir," I said. "Those ancients sure knew their stuff. I hope it's not just novelty interest."

A shadow of worry touched Latham's pudgy face. "We'll know later. Coming to the cast party?"

I shook my head and grinned. "I've got a very special celebration planned. Just me and the wife, alone. See you at rehearsal tomorrow."

I went backstage to find Lisa.

She wasn't in our dressing room. Puzzled, I went down the hall to Paul's dressing room, opened the door. "Paul, have you seen—" My voice trailed off.

I stared at them. Paul and Lisa.

"Oh hello, darling," Lisa said softly. "Isn't it wonderful, Paul's proposed!"

"And she accepted," Paul said.

"Accepted," I said.

"It'll be so perfect." Lisa was radiant. "The three of us, together!"

"But we're androids," I whispered.

"So what," Paul said happily, "you're actors, and that's what really counts. It'll be the best companionate marriage on record!"

I remember saying it would be fine. I remember shaking Paul's hand and saying no, I couldn't go

to the cast party, I had a headache. I remember stumbling back to my dressing room and wiping grease paint off and saying to the mirror, "*Et tu, Pagliaccio?*" I do not remember taking the pneumatic tube home, or getting into the inertialess lift to our apartment on the ninety-first level. Our apartment was nice. Five rooms with a glass terrace, a half mile above the city. I stood on the terrace looking at the surprise I'd planned for Lisa, the food, the crystal sparkling in the firelight, the wine.

My little surprise party.

I sat down and slowly opened the wine.

*Why?*

Paul was human, that was the answer. He could give Lisa that sense of solidity, of belonging. It's been twenty years since Emancipation, but humans still think they're doing androids a favor by marrying them. Even though androids are saving the race from suicide.

It was long after midnight when Lisa came in. She wore a sheer pink evening dress and her hair was soft gold on her shoulders and her beauty was a knife twisting in my throat.

"Oh darling," she said. "You shouldn't have waited up."

"Where's Paul?"

"Home." She hesitated. "We're taking out our companionate policy in the morning. Would you help him move his things?"

"Sure," I said.

"We'll be so happy, the three of us" Her blue eyes were tender. "Come to bed, darling."

"I'm not sleepy. Think I'll go for a walk."

I used to love to walk the city at night, staring morbidly at the hate bars, at the blood-red neons advertising violence and sudden death. I used to congratulate myself for not needing the hate bars, for not being a stinking human.

This time was different.

I stood in the rain, shivering, looking at the sign, *Joe's Hate House, Knives Only! Kill Like a Man!* It exploded in a crimson spatter of fire, now reforming, showing a dagger in a clenched fist. I stared at that dagger a long time. I was thinking about Paul.

Finally I went inside.

My first impression was of a great dim grotto, lit by smouldering tapers. There was music, a discordant cacaphony with drumbeats that made your flesh crawl. It was music out of the pit, the kind of music a Zarl would have written in its death-throes.

"Registration, sir?"

He was a fat little man in blue evening tunic who took my name, beneficiary, and ten credits admission fee.

"Spectator or participant, sir?"

His smile was jovial, but the little pig eyes were cold, dead. Those eyes watched a dozen deaths nightly. It was my job to stop those deaths, to

wipe out the hate bars, yet here I was, an Actor Ninth Class, smiling awkwardly at him, saying, "Spectator, please."

He bowed, led me to the roped-off spectator booths. I ordered a drink and gazed at the participants with a sick fascination.

They sat quietly, faces rigid, staring into the bar mirror. They drank with studied deliberation, eyes darting. A tall man in gray tunic suddenly threw his drink into a startled face. Steel flashed. There was a moan. Gray tunic fell to the sawdust-covered floor, writhing. There were shouts of delight from the spectators as two white-caped bartenders carried the body away. The drums blared.

"Not fast enough," said a voice at my elbow. "Eh, Midge?"

It was Director Latham.

"Surprised to see me here?" His smile was wry. "For your information the show was a flop."

I moistened my lips. "Impossible. The Reaction indicators—"

"Novelty only, son." He looked old, tired. "Sure, it's a beautiful show. They'll watch it for a week, two weeks." He stared bleakly at the participants. "Then the snake pits again. We've failed."

His words sank in, numbly. I whispered, "We had a sixty million audience, it's all the quota council needs. They could enact legislation tomorrow—"

"And within a week the crime

rate would be triple." Latham's voice was grim. "A man's life wouldn't be safe in broad daylight. People need emotional catharsis, the sight of blood. It's why hate bars are legal. It's why the council pours a million credits a month into our show, hoping to wean the populace, to educate them. But humans don't *care*. Why should they! Why spend a lifetime learning to write music when an android child can make you weep with a whistled tune?" His smile was infinitely bitter. "Man built better than himself. Now he's sorry, but it's too late. He needs the androids; the beauty they can give him, and he's ashamed to admit it. Here he meets himself on even terms. Our show needs some of this, Midge."

"No," I whispered. "I'll resign first."

"Will you?" His twisted smile. "You're not a free agent, mister. *The show must go on.*"

Five little words, quietly spoken.

But my head snapped erect. Those five words were a trumpet blast, a joyous shout that stiffened the spine, that made you *glad* to be an Actor, proud of your heritage.

"Damn you," I said.

"Midge White, XQ9," he said sardonically. "X: white, Caucasian type. Q: special training from the creche, type superior. 9: Actor, the very best. You're good, Midge. You've got a baritone like an organ. On-stage you're passion and fire and

storm. You can tear the heart out of an audience with a smile. You've got reflexes no human ever had, with twice the number of relay-nodes, heavier nerve fibers, instantaneous reaction time. You're the penultimate, son. You're theatre. And you're letting your audience down."

His voice was raw, a pleading whisper. "I'm only a director. You're the empathy kid, you know what the audience really needs. Give it to them."

"Sure!" I was shaking with a cold sick fury. "A few dead androids come curtain time! We can vote now, have you heard? If you prick us, do we not bleed—"

"Save it," he said wearily. "So twenty years ago you got emancipated, so what? The council still reserves the right to manufacture special androids for emergency. Humanoid types to test new antibiotics. Initial landing crews for unexplored planets. Guinea pigs—"

"Slaves," I said stiffly. "Class Nines are different, we've got free will."

"Really?" His smile grew into a smirk. "The show must—"

"Don't!" I was shaking.

"Then think of something. Stick around, absorb some atmosphere." He clapped me on the shoulder. "We're counting on you, Midge. Good night."

He was gone.

I sat, drenched in hate, staring after him, at the greedy faces around

me, the taut hungry smiles. The participants section was still as death. Nobody moved. Those figures at the bar sat rigid, hands on their knives, waiting.

I stood up. I was trembling. I walked through the gloom towards the crimson railing that ended the spectator's area. There was a soft collective sigh behind me as I vaulted over the rail.

At the bar, no one moved. It was very still and there was only the crunch of my feet in the sawdust. I carefully chose a seat at the far end of the bar as the bartender came up, smiling.

"Suicide, huh pal? No weapon?"

"Wine," I said.

He brought wine. Three stools away a little man in a brown business tunic turned his head.

"On the house," the bartender said cheerfully. "Under the rules you're allowed one taste before you become fair prey. We don't get many suicides here. Only a month ago—"

"Beat it," I said.

He moved away, hurt. I looked at the wine. The little man on my left moistened his lips and smiled.

"Made my first kill last week."

His nervous titter. "Sometimes I wonder how we got along before the hate bars. Once I was headed for a complete crackup. Failure at business, love, everything. Now I'm a new man, I'm *somebody*. Know what I mean?"

"You ever watch the telecasts?" I said.

"Pap!" he spat. "Tinsel propaganda, for children and old women."

I picked up my glass. His hand slid along the bar, towards his knife.

I sipped my wine. The little man's hand blurred. Steel glinted in the torchlight.

Any android's neural synapses are fast, and entertainer types are fastest of all. I plucked that knife out of midair, and held it thumb and forefinger, two inches from my throat.

There was a soft moan of anticipation from the spectators. The bartender chuckled. "Very nice," he said. "Under house rules he's yours. Give it to him in the belly."

The little man's adam's apple quivered. "No," he babbled. "It's not fair! Did you see how he caught it? He's an android!"

The bartender's eyes glittered. "Are you?"

"Class XQ9," I said.

The crowd stirred and muttered. Hatred coiled in the air like a live thing. I looked at the twisted faces, the snarls. I threw the knife point-first into the bar. It quivered.

"Get out," the bartender said.

I walked out. I wanted to vomit. I was thinking about Paul.

I helped Paul move into our apartment next day. He was very cheerful, and Lisa was radiant. After they came back from registration, Paul carried Lisa over the threshold ac-

cording to tradition and winked at me.

I went for a walk.

That next week I lived in a kind of quiet madness. They were together always, between rehearsals, after the show, bright heads close together, smiling and holding hands. Lisa was very sweet to me, the perfect companionate wife. It was all very civilized, very fine.

I don't know when I decided to kill Paul. Maybe it was that afternoon after rehearsal when I heard them talking about me backstage.

"I talked to Latham this morning," Paul's smug voice. "The council's going to close the show soon."

Lisa's startled gasp. "But it's a wonderful show. Midge says—"

"Midge is old hat. Latham wanted him to change the script, he refused. The public wants action, sweetheart, not this watered mush we're giving them. I want you to divorce Midge."

"Paul!"

"You don't love him, you never did. Look, baby, Midge belongs in the past with the dinosaur and the opera and video. He can't adapt. Yesterday I got an offer to entertain at one of the best hate bars in town. Five hundred credits a week! We'll make it a team act. You and me."

Faintly: "Hate bars will be banned soon."

His laughter was ugly. "Not until Midge can give the public some-

thing better, and he doesn't know how."

"I'll have to think about it," she said.

I don't know how long I stood there after their voices died away. I remember moving about the stage numbly, looking at the cages, the still trapeze, the empty clown ring. I felt dead, all dead inside. In one of the cages something moved. It was the Zarl.

We import Zarls from Callisto, especially for our show. Imagine an ecology gone mad, a complete anarchy of flora against fauna with one murderously dominant species, and you have the Zarl. This one rattled the cage bars, staring at me.

"How much longer?" it asked. Zarls are slightly telepathic.

"Perhaps six hours. Eat your meat."

"It is drugged. It will dull my reflexes so that you can kill me."

"At least you have a chance," I pointed out. "Refuse to eat and you'll starve."

Zarls have a horror of starving. Its claws scraped restlessly. "I hate you," the Zarl said.

"You hate everybody."

"You most of all. You planned this. Each night a Zarl dies." It sniffed hopelessly at the meat.

I stared at the Zarl. Slowly the thought took form.

"Before you die," I said softly, "how would you like one final kill?"

The Zarl raised its muzzle and

stared, the great yellow eyes expressionless. Then it grinned. I had to look away.

"The human," it said. "The male. You hate him."

"Yes."

"You will remove the drugged meat?"

"Yes," I said.

It brooded unwinkingly. "Done," it said.

I remember that night. Lisa was so beautiful it hurt to look at her. She was fire and quicksilver, her song was sunlight and carnival and April rain. I loved her so much I wanted to cry. I remember how we stood in the wings before that last scene, and the way she squeezed my hand and whispered, "Midge, I've been such a fool. I'm going to divorce Paul."

I could not breathe.

"I don't love him, not really." Her eyes were brimming. "I found out this afternoon what he really was. Quick, darling, there's your cue. Hurry."

"Divorce him," I said stupidly.

"You're onstage. I'll tell you all about it later."

I stumbled onstage. I wanted to scream at Paul, to warn him, I wanted to run to the Zarl's cage and bolt it tightly, but I am an Actor and I had no real choice. Midge the clown. Now singing, turning handsprings with the other clowns, juggling, dancing on the high wire. But the

music was an ancient *Danse Macabre*, the song was a leaden dirge. It had been so unnecessary! Only a blind fool would have realized that Lisa's infatuation for Paul was but a temporary thing. She loved me. She would always love me. Fool, fool and murderer! And now too late.

For Paul and Lisa were standing in the center ring singing their final duet while the Zarl crouched in its cage as the cage door opened and the Zarl roared.

The clowns scattered in mock panic. Lisa screamed.

It was all part of the act, the Zarl was supposed to lumber from its cage in a drugged stupor. It would lunge feebly at Lisa and I would slay it.

But the Zarl moved fast, fast. Lisa screamed again as it came at her in a feral rush. I dropped to the center ring, moving to intercept its anticipated charge towards Paul, then the sick agony as I understood, too late. It was after *Lisa*.

It was a nightmare in slow motion. Lisa trying to run, stumbling. Falling. The Zarl caught her.

She stopped screaming. Forever.

The Zarl lifted its muzzle and grinned at me. I killed that Zarl with my bare hands.

Through the grief and horror I realized someone was singing. Singing the *Vesti* in a cracked horrible voice as the curtain came down. My voice. The grand finale.

The lights were on, blindingly.

Paul was sobbing. The stagehands were carrying Lisa's body away. Someone was shaking me. It was Latham. His face was wet with tears.

"You've done it," he breathed. "Magnificent! What a trouper Lisa was. When the Zarl told me this afternoon I couldn't believe it. What sacrifice!"

"The Zarl told you," I said. I could not understand. He kept talking and I did not understand.

"It was the missing touch, Lisa's death at the end, the final tragedy." Latham wiped tears from his eyes. "Sheer genius, Midge! Look at those Reaction Banks!"

The Reaction indicators flared a deep ruby, washing the stage in bloody light. Latham kept talking, huskily. "The council just called. We've got a smash hit. Within a week the hate bars will be condemned. The good fight is won, Midge! Meet Lisa II, fresh from the vats."

I looked at Lisa II. I understood.

"Oh God," Paul whispered. His hysterical laughter.

Lisa II was lovely. She said with a shy smile, "I do hope we have a good rehearsal tomorrow. I won't be as good as Lisa I, but I'll certainly try."

"Rehearsal," I said numbly.

Rehearsal for her death. Tomorrow night, the next night, all the nights, forever watching Lisa die.

The show must go on. • •



# The Queer Critter

**THERE'S MORE WAYS  
THAN ONE THAT THE  
WORLD MAY BE SAVED,  
AND LITTLE LONIE'S  
IS AS GOOD AS ANY.**

**by Gordon R. Dickson**

**P**LAY YOUR GUITAR, Little Lonie, play it loud. Play *Down In the Holler*, play *Catbird's A-Cry-*

*in'*, and play *Springfield Mountain*.

Walk down the road, Little Lonie. Walk down the mountain road in the ten o'clock morning of an early spring day with the sun shining on the brush and the pines all green under the blue sky and the dust a-rising like puffs of smoke from the road where your shoe-feet hit. Walk down the dip and around the bend and into the little holler, the far holler; and meet the Queer Critter that's waiting for you there.

"Little Lonie?" it says, when you get to the bottom of the holler.

And you look right and you look left; you look high and you look low; and there you see it setting, under a bramble bush. It's a cross between a spider and something awful pretty and first off it don't seem right it can talk to you.

"Where's your mouth?" you say.

"Haven't got any, Little Lonie," it says.

"Where's your eyes?" you say.

"How come you can see me?"

"Haven't any eyes either," says the Queer Critter. "I manage though. Don't you fret about me, Little Lonie. Sit down and talk a spell."

And, half without knowing why you do it, you sit down with your guitar across your knees.

"Who be you?" you ask.

"Just a Queer Critter," it says, "from a long ways off. Further than you can think, Little Lonie, and then a far piece yet. But the main thing is, Little Lonie, I'm not a human

man, nor a human woman, either."

"Didn't figure you was," you say.

"You see," says the Queer Critter, "I been sitting by myself a long ways off; and I been hearing things about human folk. I heard so much I figured I'd come ask about them; and who should I meet this fine spring morning but you, Little Lonie."

"What-all you been hearing?" you ask.

"A pile of things," it answers back. "Some little good, but a great most bad. A real heap bad. Way out where I come from, Little Lonie, there's some that think human folk ought to be locked up where they are right now and never let go nowhere. And there's even some others say they oughtn't be allowed to live."

That kind of makes you laugh.

"I know folks like that," you say.

"You do?" says the Queer Critter.

"Why sure," you say. "They's always some a little sour and some a trifle skeered; but you can get 'em out of it."

"How do you get them out of it?" asks the Queer Critter.

"Times by talking," you say, "times by playing them out of it. Me and my guitar got a song for near every trouble."

"That so?" it says, real polite for a Queer Critter, "now, suppose someone was to come up to you and say that spite of Scripture there's mighty few among human folk loves their fellow man—or their fellow critter, either."

"Why, I'd figure," you answer, letting your fingers kind of stray on the steel strings of the guitar, "I'd figure the one as said that had been hearing too much from other folks that were plumb born worriers. I'd figure he didn't know folks like I know them. For a one like that, I'd figure he's forgotten all the lovin' couples and all the mothers that love their children; and I'd sing him some love songs and some cradle songs."

"That's all right about that," says the Queer Critter, "but how about them not loving critters?"

"Why, bless you," you says, "there's a great heap of folks loves critters. Why, I could sing you any number of dog-lovin' and horse-lovin' songs. I even know one fish-lovin' song."

"Maybe that's true," it says, "but those are critters folk already know."

"What's that got to do with it?" you says back. "Was a time each one didn't know them—they just learned, is all. You figure nobody's born knowing horses, or dogs, or fish. All a body's born with's the lovin' feel. You got that, you kin learn to love ary critter, be you given a chance."

"Might be that's so," admits the Queer Critter, "but you got to admit human folk do a lot of terrible fighting and killing."

"I can't deny that," you says, "but fighting, it comes out of pure unhappiness. Fighting and killing comes usual out of pure misery."

Leave it up to most any man or woman I know and he won't fight nor kill long as he's feeling good and happy."

"Well," says the Queer Critter, "and whose fault is it that a man's unhappy, if it isn't his own? Hasn't he had a chance to make the world a happy place?"

"Reckon he has," you says, "if you want to call it a chance. But shucks, I call it just a little old part of a chance."

"Don't see how you figure that, Little Lonie," it says.

"Don't take figuring," you says, "just stands to reason, that's all."

"That's a mighty weak answer, Little Lonie," says the Queer Critter.

"Might be for some people," you says, minding yourself of the distance you got yet to go, and getting to your feet. "Might be for just about anybody but the most of folks. Heard tell once folks all lived in caves, though I could never get it straight if that was afore the Flood or after. Might be Adam and Eve found a cave to live in after they got throwed out of the Garden. Might be Noah and his folks all had to hunt up a cave when the water went down. Don't make no difference, for the point is, they didn't stay in them caves. 'Cause that's folks. They just got to change things; and wasn't never no change made yet without some dust-up in the doing of it. Shucks, folks ain't angels—they're *folk*! When you get

back to them as have been saying so much about human folk, you tell'm that. Folk got two things. Most of them try, and most of them got the right feelin's to start with; and if they ever come visiting that-away, tell your friends to remember that; and they and human folks'll get along just fine."

"I'll do that, Little Lonie," says the Queer Critter. "Now you just stand back away from my lightnin' rod things here, and I'll be on my way."

And with that the Queer Critter aims a couple of shiny rods at the ground and all of a sudden, *swish-pop*, it's gone, and you don't see it no more.

So you scratch your head for a minute, looking at the place where it set. Then you shrug your shoulders, Little Lonie, and turn back on to the road, heading up the far side of the holler and all along on down the way to the next place to stop. And the sun comes through the pines; and the birds bounce on the bramble branches; and you swing the guitar around so that it hangs by its shoulder cord in front of you where your fingers can reach.

For out of pure happiness you feel like singing. And you go on down the road playing and singing a new song just come into your head but one that you'll be playing on many a doorstep to come. For it's a pretty tune and it's called *Great Day A'Dawnin'*. . . .

# AUNT ELSE'S STAIRWAY

by Anthony Riker



THE MALODONS AND JAROPPI PIE WERE TO BE FOUND ON

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS;

WHO CAN BLAME A MAN FOR CHOOSING AS BLAKE FENTON DID?

**B**LAKE FENTON had always known his Aunt Else Purgee as a round-cheeked, cheerful woman who was all kindness and concern, although she could be, at times, a little bit odd.

As Blake grew older, from childhood to boyhood, it became constantly more difficult to reconcile the cheerfulness, the round-cheeked vitality, of Aunt Else with the picture of the other gaunt-cheeked, gaunt-eyed Aunt Else that grew bit by bit, fed surreptitiously by scraps of character at picnics and family reunions and in the back parlors at family funerals. That was another Aunt Else altogether, a woman he had never known and found it hard to conceive, even with the aid of the scattered word pictures and hints that, in time, he began to collect as another boy might collect birds' eggs or postage stamps.

He could never remember when or where he first got a glimpse of that other, earlier, Aunt Else. It was lost somewhere on the vague threshold of expanding awareness between "what a cunning little fellow" and "my, my, but our Blake certainly is a little man now."

Even as a little fellow Blake Fen-

ton had looked forward ecstatically to every visit to the trim, always neatly painted home of his Aunt Else. It was a tallish, thin-waisted sort of a house that looked even taller, like a flat-chested, tightly corseted spinster, with its half-lot of green lawn and red brick bordered flower beds on either side. But its greatest charm was inside, in the two and one-half floors of rooms beyond and above the narrow roofed porch that sprawled across the front and shouldered its way all the way back on either side.

Perhaps the secret of its interior charm, for a boy growing up in a world of suddenly quickened change, was the fact that within Aunt Else Purgee's house nothing ever changed.

It was only much later, as a man, that he was to understand the deeper reason for the static quality inside a house which Aunt Else always kept so bright and white on the outside. In those first dreadful years after what the family called "the night Abner left" and older elements of the town referred to more bluntly as "Major Purgee's disappearance" it must have been sheer indrawn hopelessness, an enervating

vacuity of will, that kept the middle-aged woman, growing haggard and gaunt then, from touching a single stick of the furniture or changing as much as one of the broad-framed pictures, even the portrait of Major Abner Purgee in his Spanish-American War uniform. In the years that followed, when Else Purgee's cheeks filled out again and reddened with high good health, it is doubtful if she ever again saw those rooms with more than half a mind. But as a boy Blake Fenton could hardly have guessed at all that, and none of the others were ever to know.

All that Blake was ever to know of his Uncle Abner was that portrait, weak in line and composition but heroic in color and pose, which hung in its great wooden frame just above the foot of the lower stairs. Abner himself must have hung it there for some reason best known to himself. It was an odd place for a portrait of the master of the house, even a bad portrait; well, the family was agreed that Abner Purgee had always been an odd man.

But as a schoolboy at a public school in the other end of the town Blake hardly had to wait for the whispers of the family to piece together the facts of Abner Purgee's disappearance, which already was blurring into a sort of mythological permanence. The facts, to the great discomfiture of the town itself, were very few. So few that, after a hurried and expectant pawing of Abner

Purgee's whole life since boyhood, it was reluctantly agreed that there seemed little reason to believe that the graying but still good-looking major had run off with a woman or to a woman or even from a woman, even Else Purgee. Though there had been, in fact, a measure of half-hearted conjecture on that last score.

The major had simply disappeared.

Else Purgee took it hard. For a time, just for a time, she tried to carry on as usual, swishing her gay little parasol to the afternoon gatherings on the elm-shaded lawns of neighbors, milling with the others at the frequent evening socials at the church or parsonage. Everyone was kind. Too kind perhaps. Gradually, week by week and month by month, Else Purgee gave up the brave battle against the sudden silences that greeted her appearances; withdrew to the sanctuary of the two and a half stories of the thin, narrow-waisted Purgee house.

In those months she grew thinner. In time, on her infrequent trips to market or to church, the town was amazed at the stringy gauntness of her once so plump body and the shadowy hollows of her cheeks. Within two years the town had begun to accept this new Else Purgee as *the* Else Purgee. Even the immediate family learned slowly to shrug it off and leave Else Purgee pretty much alone, as she so definitely wished to be left alone.

Then, two years later, came the amazing reappearance of Major Abner Purgee—a short-lived sensation.

It was not, to be utterly truthful, exactly a reappearance, despite the whispered word, "Major Purgee is back," which swept the town.

A workman, walking home to the town's more squalid quarters after a night shift at the pottery, told of seeing Major Abner Purgee striding briskly through the deserted business section. An owl car motor-man corroborated the tale. It was autumn then, a chilly autumn. The man they saw had his hat tugged low and his greatcoat collar pulled up about his neck and chin. But both were certain, despite the all but hidden face in the before-dawn hour, that it was the Major they saw.

The older families, in the older sections of the town, when the word finally reached them through their servants, at first poohpoohed the wild tale. But it was harder to be skeptical a week or so later when old Doc Blaine, driving his gray gelding along Elm Street on a midnight call, saw the Major puttering slowly along the flagstone sidewalk, halting to gaze at each of the friendly old brick houses in turn, like a man long homesick returned from the wars. It was hard to doubt the old doctor's word or the old doctor's eye. Then, when autumn already was chilling into early winter, Else and Abner in arm under the shadows of the Purgee were twice seen strolling arm

twisty old trees of the neighborhood in the hours after bedtime.

Her family, brothers and sisters, rushing to the tall house where she lived alone, put the question bluntly to Else.

"Is the Major back?"

The gaunt woman, whose sunken cheeks already were starting to fill and redden, kept her lips tight and made no answer, though the brothers and sisters could have sworn there was mocking laughter in her eyes. The final flurry of gossip, given little credence but retold often, was provided by a visitor to Else Purgee's house. When she entered the front hall, she reported, a well-brushed derby of the Major's was hanging from a spike on the cumbersome front hall cloak rack. Discreetly, she said nothing; that, at least, was her story. Later, while taking tea with Else Purgee in the downstairs sitting room, she could have sworn, she said, to hearing cautious foot treads on the stair. When she went back into the hall to take her departure the hat was gone.

It was sometime during the period when the intermittent rumors of the Major's reappearance were enlivening an otherwise dull season that Else Purgee moved her bed to the top floor. Just when she did that none of the brothers and sisters ever really knew. A visiting sister made the discovery. They all argued with her then, of course, to return to her old bedroom on the second floor;

failing in that they argued, with no more success, that she should at least install another water closet on the tiny third floor.

That third floor, hardly more than half a story in fact, may once have been an attic. But in much earlier years, when a large family of little Purgees were growing up in the old house, it had been converted into a bedroom. There was only one other room on the floor, a smaller room opening off the attic bedroom that had become a sort of catch-all over the years; a room which no one, except perhaps Abner or Else, had entered in what is still commonly referred to in the town as "a coon's age."

The family carried on a running battle for weeks, months even; first to bring Else Purgee out of her third floor bedroom, then to clear away the old storeroom as a modern lavatory. Else Purgee only maintained her usual tight-lipped, mocking-eyed silence. She stayed and the storeroom stayed.

It was during the months and years immediately following the briefly rumored "return" of the Major, that neighbors and friends began to remark the emergence of little eccentricities in Else Purgee. Perhaps, they told each other knowingly, it was that strange, brief visit of Abner Purgee that had affected the tall, lonely woman in the tall, lonely house. Whether or not it had done anything to her mind, it certainly

had affected her health. She became the round-cheeked, cheerful woman that Blake Fenton and the other nephews and nieces were to know so well, though none, perhaps, better than Blake. She was no longer gaunt of body; there was a definite look of complete fulfillment about her.

The Major was never seen again, but in those earlier years Else Purgee spoke of him often, quoting pithy remarks of his as though they had been made only that morning at the breakfast table. She had a way of biting her lower lip when she caught herself in an unguarded reference to her husband that only added to the mystery of her growing eccentricities.

One afternoon, five or six years after the Major's briefly-rumored return, she blurted to a sister the astonishing news that the Major was dead.

"But he had a good life these past years," she said. "He was very happy."

That was all she would say about the death of Major Abner Purgee and even the family could never be really sure. In time, however, they came intuitively to accept the possibility that Else might have had her own way of knowing. The neighbors only smiled, but the smiles were kindly ones. They liked this red-cheeked, friendly woman whom they saw so infrequently.

There was something odd about that, too, they agreed, but they kept their questions unasked. The day of



friendly tolerance when tolerance itself was a seldom-heard word had not yet passed, though the concrete and steel fingers of a brawling new age already were pushing toward Elm Street and Maple Avenue. They simply accepted the fact that for weeks at a time Else Purgee apparently lived alone within the confines of the wasp-waisted old house, with not even an infrequent sally to the grocer's or the baker's and no delivery trucks stopping at the Purgee door. Just as they came to accept the equally odd fact that, for a woman who stayed so much indoors, Else Purgee's plump face and neck and arms managed always, even in early autumn and late winter, to keep a surprisingly brown suntan.

If Major Purgee dropped out of his wife's, or his widow's, conversation there were other conversational eccentricities that became whispered family legends. Such as her remark that, "The glissings and the glox are lovely this spring and the jaroppi blossoms were never more beautiful." Or her casual statement that the past winter had been a pleasantly open, mild one, when everyone remembered the payroll for snow-shovellers that all but flattened a depleted town treasury.

To the rest of the family the glissings and glox and jaroppi remained only words; to Blake Fenton, in the fabulous years between his ninth and his eleventh birthdays, they became things, lovely, fragrant things,

to be sniffed and touched and placed forever in special niches of the memory with the apple blossoms on Adam's Hill and the autumn paw-paw fruit along Mill Creek.

It was typical of the very special relationship that grew up slowly between the wide-eyed, lonely only child and the full-cheeked recluse that she allowed him to share even that much of her great secret. And as equally typical that the boy did not once think of hinting to others, by so much as a word or a look, of the things he found in the quiet, aging house where he went to play so often after his mother's death.

Perhaps it was the boy's innate ability to accept the world always on its own terms, no matter how odd or unbelievable those terms might seem at times, that created a subtle bond between them. Or perhaps it was a native strain of vivid imagination which had early led him to the knowledge that to ask too many questions was to make of the world a dull, prosaic place. Blake Fenton had learned that it is sometimes best to withhold the ultimate questions; the imagination, he found, could supply answers much more wonderful than the flat truth could ever be. At least he thought that then.

Blake Fenton could hardly have been more than nine the day he found the glox. That discovery was made purely by accident. It was one of those hot summer days, blazing

hot by mid-morning, that sent even children into the cool shadowy interiors of old houses. Aunt Else was busy in the kitchen. Young Blake, playing quietly by himself in the front hall, invented some wonderful new game which took him slowly up the stairs to the second floor and up the shorter, narrower stairs to Aunt Else's top floor room. Always before on his infrequent journeys to the top of the house, severely frowned upon by his aunt, he had found her bedroom door locked. But on this hot July morning the door stood partially ajar. The boy hesitated for only a moment, then pushed into the room.

Every single item in that place of mystery, however commonplace, should have captured the child's imagination. Instead, he found his gaze riveted on a bowl of cut flowers on Else Purgee's dresser. They were the strangest flowers he had ever seen. And the most beautiful. The huge blossoms were of a deeply vivid color that no paint box, no forays into spring orchards or summer meadows or autumn woods had ever taught him.

Strangest of all was their glistening wetness. Moisture beaded their broad petals, dripped slowly from their thick stems.

As he moved across the room he saw for the first time the tell-tale trail of puddled wetness across the faded carpet. Someone, perhaps only minutes before, had walked from the

closed storeroom door to Aunt Else's dresser, then returned. Someone whose shoes were wet and whose cloak was rain-wet and dripping.

A startled gasp came from the hall doorway. Blake Fenton whirled to find his aunt towering there.

For a moment the two, woman and boy, stood staring at each other. At last she moved toward him, but when she was almost at his side she hesitated, her gaze swinging from her wide-eyed nephew to the closed storeroom door. Slowly, her face softened, the firm, angry line of her jaw relaxed.

"It's that Mrs. Malodon; she's always doing friendly things like that," Else Purgee said softly, as though that explained everything.

It would be hard to say whether what she did next she did out of confidence in her nephew or from sheer acceptance of the fact that the boy had already seen enough to make the gamble almost obligatory.

"I'm going downstairs, but only for a moment," she said. "You must not go near that door, Blake."

Whatever her motive, she had judged her nephew rightly. Perhaps Blake Fenton, at the age of nine, lacked something of that driving curiosity and disregard of authority not altogether unbecoming in a growing boy. He was standing at a window, gazing down on a sunbaked lawn, when Else Purgee returned. She wore a frayed old coat which she used only on rainy days and car-

ried a rolled umbrella in one hand. With the other hand she held a pan of blueberry muffins hot from the oven and covered by a tea towel and several thicknesses of newspaper.

"Mrs. Malodon loves blueberry muffins," the round-cheeked woman told her nephew. "And they'll be doubly nice on a gloomy, rainy day."

Else Purgee opened the storeroom door, and closed it behind her. Blake Fenton heard a key turn in the lock on the further side. He was crying when his aunt returned five minutes later, locking the storeroom behind her. The umbrella was wet now and there was a trace of mud on Else Purgee's shoes.

His aunt shucked out of the old, rain-splotched coat, pulled a kerchief from an apron pocket, and daubed the tears from her nephew's eyes. There was a strangely compassionate softness in Else Purgee's eyes and for one spine-tingling, breath-stopping moment Blake Fenton felt almost certain that his aunt would offer to take him back with her for a moment, just one moment, across the threshold of the storeroom door. Perhaps, if he were lucky, even down the stairway that must lead to the rain-wet, muddy backyard of Mrs. Malodon's house. There was a stairway there, he knew; an open, wooden stair that led down from the storeroom to the rear lawn like some gaunt, forgotten fire-escape. But that stairway, the stairway he knew, did not lead to Mrs. Malodon's.

The moment of breathless anticipation was followed almost at once by a wave of nausea, of revulsion, of actual fear of that closed doorway. Blake Fenton was glad when his aunt took him by the hand and led him from the room.

Safely downstairs again, in the kitchen she carefully unfurled a bundled tea towel which had covered the muffin pan. Within were more of the strange, unearthly blooms that Else Purgee called by the name of glox. There was a strange fruit there, too; a huge fruit, very like a giant pear, except that it was blue—a deep, shimmering blue like no earthly blue the boy had ever seen.

"It's a jaroppi fruit," Else Purgee told the wide-eyed child. "Mrs. Malodon sent it just for you, Blake. But you must not go outside the house to eat it."

She chuckled when the boy's lips puckered involuntarily as he bit into the fruit.

"They're not fully ripe yet, really," she said. "Later they'll turn almost purple; then they are truly ripe. Then we will have some jaroppi pie, Blake, just you and I. And next spring you shall see the jaroppi blossoms. They are beautiful, Blake, the jaroppi blossoms."

They did have jaroppi pie many times during the later summer and the early fall, alone together in the thin-waisted old house, and in the spring she brought him the blossoms, glowing red and gold and not

at all like the giant purple-blue fruit.

But the door to Else Purgee's top-floor room was never again left open.

Perhaps if Blake Fenton had continued to grow up in the town, there might have been a day when that door would have been open to him; perhaps even that other door to the old, unused storeroom and the stairway beyond. Perhaps, but the boy did not stay in town. It was only five days after his eleventh birthday that Blake Fenton's father went to a new job in a faraway city and Blake Fenton went with him, to a new, strange life that, within a year, was to include a stepmother and a half-sister and a whole new world of "relatives" that he had never met before. In time the glox and the warm jaroppi pies, like the late summer apples on Adam's Hill and the paw-paws along Mill Creek, were forgotten.

Or almost forgotten.

There was the summer when he was twenty-one and already marked at the office as one of the bright young men, that he chose to revisit the town on his annual week's vacation with pay. Meeting old schoolmates was a disappointment; he had been too lonely as a child, too young when he left for the city. So, very soon, he was at his Aunt Else's house, in the parlor that was still a parlor, with his aunt's hands upon his shoulders. She was older now, but like the house itself, she seemed somehow only a little older. There was no doubt of his welcome. It was

there in Else Purgee's eyes as the tall woman looked into the eyes of her nephew, on a level with her own now; it was in the grip of her fingers on his shoulders.

For a moment, just for a moment, Blake Fenton felt that spine-tingling, breath-stopping sense of expectancy which had come to him that hot July morning, so many years ago, when he had stood with his aunt by that closed door in the upper room. But something Else Purgee found in his eyes, or something she failed to find there, caused her to hesitate and the moment was lost.

Within an hour he was on a train bound for the city. He never expected to go back.

Blake Fenton was already well on the way to a vice-presidency in his company when Else Purgee died. They found her, he was told, in the little upper bedroom she had stubbornly insisted on keeping to the last. They found her slumped against the storeroom door, dead fingers clutching the knob. Only Blake Fenton guessed at the truth. Only Blake Fenton knew, when the will was probated, why Else Purgee had left the house and all of its contents to him.

He left the handling of the old house to Simon Soames who had been for years the Purgees' family lawyer, as his father had been before him. Blake Fenton proceeded to forget the very existence of the old house, as he had forgotten so much

else. He already had his vice-presidency, a shinier and larger office, and a comfortably swelling bank account that he found little time to spend, when a letter from old Soames sent him back on what was to be his last visit.

It was a simple enough letter. Nothing about it called for his presence in the town. Soames wrote that an insurance firm had offered a tidy sum for the old Purgee place as a site for a new office building. The offer hardly surprised Blake Fenton. Long ago the new world of concrete and steel had begun to shoulder its way onto Elm Street and Maple Avenue; the old elms and maples already had fallen before the ax and the bulldozer.

He dictated a brief note to Soames advising him to sell. It should have been as simple as that, but it was not. The note was never signed, never mailed. When the day's work was over, he stayed on irresolutely in the office; sat alone for a long time at his desk in the deserted, silent building that was like a steel and granite tomb in the fading evening. The memories that had been little more than nagging annoyances since the arrival of Simon Soames' letter, grew in the unaccustomed silence into a torrent, a warm flood that engulfed him.

In the end he fingered the duplicate key to the old house, which Soames had sent him two years before, the key that had never been

used; wired Soames to do nothing until he should arrive.

His hometown, when he stepped from the train to a new concrete platform before a new station, struck him like a blow. This was another town, even the few old landmarks served only to remind him more poignantly of the magnitude of the change. The faces in the station, on the street, were the faces he had left behind in the city; the eyes that met his were the same glittering, greedy eyes of squirrels racing on a treadmill after larger and larger nuts that were always just out of reach, content always to run a little faster, a little faster.

The old, innate ability to accept life always on its own terms, whatever those terms might be, had betrayed him. He had sensed that vaguely in those long hours of the train journey. He knew it now. Perhaps, he thought it had betrayed them all.

He had meant to go first to Simon Soames' office. Instead, he stepped into a taxi and ordered the driver to take him directly to the old Purgee place. It was typical of this new town, he realized with a sharp pang, that he had to give the driver the exact street address.

He stood for a while on the sidewalk, surveying the place. Along the whole length of the street the elms and maples that had made cool green arches in the summer were gone. On one side of the house a

four-story brick apartment building shouldered the edge of the Purgee property, that was Blake Fenton's property now. At the other side stood a three-story building housing a hodge-podge assortment of offices and small shops. Between them the thin-waisted old house with its sprawling verandas stood freshly painted, bright blue shutters across each window. Blake Fenton, from his desk in the city, had insisted that the old house be kept primly painted, as it always had been in Else Purgee's day. He regretted that now. Shabby gentility would have been, in these surroundings, more becoming.

Inside, in the dusky hallway, Abner Purgee's portrait greeted Blake Fenton like a dim ghost from his childhood.

It was the boy, the boy who had spent so many happy hours in the old house, who had found or created a childhood world of his own in its high-ceilinged rooms, who sat quietly now in the dim-lit, shuttered parlor. The man of affairs, the vice-president, found himself acutely uncomfortable there. He found himself thinking of too many things he did not care to think about, had never allowed himself to think about. Of his broken marriage that had lasted so short a time. Of the trim suburban cottage, bought with such high hopes, gone so quickly in the wreckage of that marriage. Of—but there were too many things.

It was the boy, the ghost of a wide-eyed, eager boy of nine, who forced him at last up the stairs to the darkened second floor hall and up those other, narrower stairs to Else Purgee's little third-story room.

Again, as on that earlier visit, he had no eyes for the room or its austere, scanty furnishings. But this time there were no strange, beautiful blossoms to draw him. It was the doorway alone that drew him now, the narrow door to the storeroom and to the strange stairway beyond.

All of the bits and scraps of gossip hoarded so carefully in childhood fell neatly into place now, formed a pattern. It was a surprising pattern, an almost unbelievable pattern, but it brought no shock of surprise to the mature man standing before the closed storeroom door. Perhaps, he thought, the truth had been there all the time in the depths of his mind, unwelcome, unrecognized.

No one now could ever know nor even guess when or how that strange extra-dimensional stairway between worlds had first appeared. Nor just when Abner Purgee had first found that it was there. Certainly he must have kept it secret from his wife for a long time. Blake Fenton understood, suddenly, the hell of torture through which Abner Purgee must have walked in those days and nights before he made his final choice between worlds. He saw now clearly, with a depth of compassion

he had never before known, the essential tragedy of Else Purgee, powerless to choose, valiantly seeking a measure of happiness in compromise.

He saw now, too, with an awful, blinding clarity a truth he had never guessed before—that though man has always dreamed, will always dream, of a doorway, of another chance, he cringes instinctively from the reality, unable or unwilling to make a choice.

Blake Fenton turned away and hurried down the two flights of stairs. There was a neighborhood drug store on the far corner. From a pay booth he dialed Simon Soames' office, waved away Soames' ejaculation of surprise.

"Sell the place," he ordered.

Close the doorway! Wreck it, smash it, destroy it!

His hands, his whole body trembled as he pushed to a stool at the little fountain, ordered coffee. For a long time, over the coffee, he sat staring at the taut, tired face reflected from the back-bar mirror. At last he buried his face in his hands. He heard the fountain girl move toward him.

"Is something wrong?" she asked. Blake Fenton looked up at her.

"Yes," he said quietly. "A lot is wrong."

He rose and walked the half block back to the old Purgee place. In the hall, he stood for a long moment staring at the dust-coated portrait

of Abner Purgee before he began climbing the stairs.

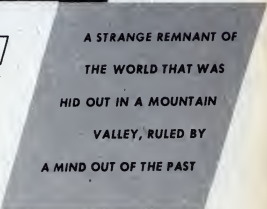
Somehow, somewhere, perhaps in his own childhood, this world that was his world had made a wrong turning onto a blind street; had shucked off all of its old traditions to sign a blind, greedy contract with the future. Perhaps, just perhaps, Blake Fenton told himself as he trudged up the narrow staircase, in that other world that was somehow so close they would have asked to read the small print on the contract before they signed.

The knob of the storeroom door turned in his hand. He hesitated only seconds before he pushed the door open, stepped through the doorway that so soon now would be destroyed. For just a moment, as he closed the door behind him, the room was at his back. He felt a pleasant breeze against his cheek and turned slowly. The room's one window was unshuttered and open. Through the open window he caught the fragrance of new-mown grass; heard the shrill laughter of children at play in the yard next door. A jaroppi bough, heavy with red and gold blossoms, scraped lightly against the window screen. From somewhere far came the tinkle of bells of an ice-cream cart. Blake Fenton crossed the room to the outer stair.

"I hope the Malodons still live in that house across the alley," he told himself, and grinned. • • •




# ***THE LAST of the MASTERS***



**A STRANGE REMNANT OF  
THE WORLD THAT WAS  
HID OUT IN A MOUNTAIN  
VALLEY, RULED BY  
A MIND OUT OF THE PAST**

**by Philip K. Dick**





CONSCIOUSNESS collected around him. He returned with reluctance; the weight of centuries, an unbearable fatigue, lay over him. The ascent was painful. He would have shrieked if there were anything to shriek with. And anyhow, he was beginning to feel glad.

Eight thousand times he had crept back thus, with ever-increasing difficulty. Someday he wouldn't make it. Someday the black pool would remain. But not this day. He was still alive; above the aching pain and reluctance came joyful triumph.

"Good morning," a bright voice said. "Isn't it a nice day? I'll pull the curtains and you can look out."

He could see and hear. But he couldn't move. He lay quietly and allowed the various sensations of the room to pour in on him. Carpets, wallpaper, tables, lamps, pictures. Desk and vidscreen. Gleaming yellow sunlight streamed through the window. Blue sky. Distant hills. Fields, buildings, roads, factories. Workers and machines.

Peter Green was busily straightening things, his young face wreathed with smiles. "Lots to do today. Lots of people to see you. Bills to sign. Decisions to make. This is Saturday. There will be people coming in from the remote sectors. I hope the maintenance crew has done a good job." He added quickly, "They have, of course. I talked to Fowler on my way over here. Everything's fixed up fine."

The youth's pleasant tenor mixed with the bright sunlight. Sounds and sights, but nothing else. He could feel nothing. He tried to move his arm but nothing happened.

"Don't worry," Green said, catching his terror. "They'll soon be along with the rest. You'll be all right. You *have* to be. How could we survive without you?"

He relaxed. God knew, it had happened often enough before. Anger surged dully. Why couldn't they coordinate? Get it up all at once, not piecemeal. He'd have to change their schedule. Make them organize better.

Past the bright window a squat metal car chugged to a halt. Uniformed men piled out, gathered up heavy armloads of equipment, and hurried toward the main entrance of the building.

"Here they come," Green exclaimed with relief. "A little late, eh?"

"Another traffic tie-up," Fowler snorted, as he entered. "Something wrong with the signal system again. Outside flow got mixed up with the urban stuff; tied up on all sides. I wish you'd change the law."

Now there was motion all around him. The shapes of Fowler and McLean loomed, two giant moons abruptly ascendant. Professional faces that peered down at him anxiously. He was turned over on his side. Muffled conferences. Urgent whispers. The clank of tools.

"Here," Fowler muttered. "Now here. No, that's later. Be careful. Now run it up through here."

The work continued in taut silence. He was aware of their closeness. Dim outlines occasionally cut off his light. He was turned this way and that, thrown around like a sack of meal.

"Okay," Fowler said. "Tape it."

A long silence. He gazed dully at the wall, at the slightly-faded blue and pink wallpaper. An old design that showed a woman in hoopskirts, with a little parasol over her dainty shoulder. A frilly white blouse, tiny tips of shoes. An astoundingly clean puppy at her side.

Then he was turned back, to face upward. Five shapes groaned and strained over him. Their fingers flew, their muscles rippled under their shirts. At last they straightened up and retreated, Fowler wiped sweat from his face; they were all tense and bleary-eyed.

"Go ahead," Fowler rasped. "Throw it."

Shock hit him. He gasped. His body arched, then settled slowly down.

*His body.* He could feel. He moved his arms experimentally. He touched his face, his shoulder, the wall. The wall was real and hard. All at once the world had become three-dimensional again.

Relief showed on Fowler's face. "Thank God." He sagged wearily. "How do you feel?"

After a moment he answered, "All right."

Fowler sent the rest of the crew out. Green began dusting again, off in the corner. Fowler sat down on the edge of the bed and lit his pipe. "Now listen to me," he said. "I've got bad news. I'll give it to you the way you always want it, straight from the shoulder."

"What is it?" he demanded. He examined his fingers. He already knew.

There were dark circles under Fowler's eyes. He hadn't shaved. His square-jawed face was drawn and unhealthy. "We were up all night. Working on your motor system. We've got it jury-rigged, but it won't hold. Not more than another few months. The thing's climbing. The basic units can't be replaced. When they wear they're gone. We can weld in relays and wiring, but we can't fix the five synopsis-coils. There were only a few men who could make those, and they've been dead two centuries. If the coils burn out—"

"Is there any deterioration in the synopsis-coils?" he interrupted.

"Not yet. Just motor areas. Arms, in particular. What's happening to your legs will happen to your arms and finally all your motor system. You'll be paralyzed by the end of the year. You'll be able to see, hear, and think. And broadcast. But that's all." He added, "Sorry, Bors. We're doing all we can."

"All right," Bors said. "You're excused. Thanks for telling me straight. I—guessed."

"Ready to go down? A lot of people with problems, today. They're stuck until you get there."

"Let's go." He focussed his mind with an effort and turned his attention to the details of the day. "I want the heavy metals research program speeded. It's lagging, as usual. I may have to pull a number of men from related work and shift them to the generators. The water level will be dropping soon. I want to start feeding power along the lines while there's still power to feed. As soon as I turn my back everything starts falling apart."

Fowler signalled Green and he came quickly over. The two of them bent over Bors and, grunting, hoisted him up and carried him to the door. Down the corridor and outside.

They deposited him in the squat metal car, the new little service truck. Its polished surface was a startling contrast to his pitted, corroded hull, bent and splotched and eaten away. A dull, patina-covered machine of archaic steel and plastic that hummed faintly, rustily, as the men leaped in the front seat and raced the car out onto the main highway.

Edward Tolby perspired, pushed his pack up higher, hunched over, tightened his gun belt, and cursed.

"Daddy," Silvia reproved. "Cut that."

Tolby spat furiously in the grass at the side of the road. He put his arm around his slim daughter. "Sorry, Silv. Nothing personal. The damn heat."

Mid-morning sun shimmered down on the dusty road. Clouds of dust rose and billowed around the three as they pushed slowly along. They were dead tired. Tolby's heavy face was flushed and sullen. An unlit cigarette dangled between his lips. His big, powerfully built body was hunched resentfully forward. His daughter's canvas shirt clung moistly to her arms and breasts. Moons of sweat darkened her back. Under her jeans her thigh muscles rippled wearily.

Robert Penn walked a little behind the two Tolbys, hands deep in his pockets, eyes on the road ahead. His mind was blank; he was half asleep from the double shot of hexobarb he had swallowed at the last League camp. And the heat lulled him. On each side of the road fields stretched out, pastures of grass and weeds, a few trees here and there. A tumbled-down farmhouse. The ancient rusting remains of a bomb shelter, two centuries old. Once, some dirty sheep.

"Sheep," Penn said. "They eat the grass too far down. It won't grow back."

"Now he's a farmer," Tolby said to his daughter.

"Daddy," Silvia snapped. "Stop being nasty."

"It's this heat. This damn heat." Tolby cursed again, loudly and futilely. "It's not worth it. For ten pinks I'd go back and tell them it was a lot of pig swill."

"Maybe it is, at that," Penn said mildly.

"All right, you go back," Tolby grunted. "You go back and tell them it's a lot of pig swill. They'll pin a medal on you. Maybe raise you up a grade."

Penn laughed. "Both of you shut up. There's some kind of town ahead."

Tolby's massive body straightened eagerly. "Where?" He shielded his eyes. "By God, he's right. A village. And it isn't a mirage. You see it, don't you?" His good humor returned and he rubbed his big hands together. "What say, Penn. A couple of beers, a few games of throw with some of the local peasants—maybe we can stay overnight." He licked his thick lips with anticipation. "Some of those village wenches, the kind that hang around the grog shops—"

"I know the kind you mean," Penn broke in. "The kind that are tired of doing nothing. Want to see the big commercial centers. Want to meet some guy that'll buy them mecho-stuff and take them places."

At the side of the road a farmer was watching them curiously. He had halted his horse and stood lean-

ing on his crude plow, hat pushed back on his head.

"What's the name of this town?" Tolby yelled.

The farmer was silent a moment. He was an old man, thin and weathered. "This town?" he repeated.

"Yeah, the one ahead."

"That's a nice town." The farmer eyed the three of them. "You been through here before?"

"No, sir," Tolby said. "Never."

"Team break down?"

"No, we're on foot."

"How far you come?"

"About a hundred and fifty miles."

The farmer considered the heavy packs strapped on their backs. Their cleated hiking shoes. Dusty clothing and weary, sweat-streaked faces. Jeans and canvas shirts. Ironite walking staffs. "That's a long way," he said. "How far you going?"

"As far as we feel like it," Tolby answered. "Is there a place ahead we can stay? Hotel? Inn?"

"That town," the farmer said, "is Fairfax. It has a lumber mill, one of the best in the world. A couple of pottery works. A place where you can get clothes put together by machines. Regular mecho-clothing. A gun shop where they pour the best shot this side of the Rockies. And a bakery. Also there's an old doctor living there, and a lawyer. And some people with books to teach the kids. They came here with t.b. They made a school house out of an old barn."

"How large a town?" Penn asked.

"Lot of people. More born all the time. Old folks die. Kids die. We had a fever last year. About a hundred kids died. Doctor said it came from the water hole. We shut the water hole down. Kids died anyhow. Doctor said it was the milk. Drove off half the cows. Not mine. I stood out there with my gun and I shot the first of them came to drive off my cow. Kids stopped dying as soon as fall came. I think it was the heat."

"Sure is hot," Tolby agreed.

"Yes, it gets hot around here. Water's pretty scarce." A crafty look slid across his old face. "You folks want a drink? The young lady looks pretty tired. Got some bottles of water down under the house. In the mud. Nice and cold." He hesitated. "Pink a glass."

Tolby laughed. "No, thanks."

"Two glasses a pink," the farmer said.

"Not interested," Penn said. He thumped his canteen and the three of them started on. "So long."

The farmer's face hardened. "Damn foreigners," he muttered. He turned angrily back to his plowing.

The town baked in silence. Flies buzzed and settled on the backs of stupefied horses, tied up at posts. A few cars were parked here and there. People moved listlessly along the sidewalks. Elderly lean-bodied men dozed on porches. Dogs and chickens slept in the shade under houses. The houses were small,

wooden, chipped and peeling boards, leaning and angular—and old. Warped and split by age and heat. Dust lay over everything. A thick blanket of dry dust over the cracking houses and the dull-faced men and animals.

Two lank men approached them from an open doorway. "Who are you? What do you want?"

They stopped and got out their identification. The men examined the sealed-plastic cards. Photographs, fingerprints, data. Finally they handed them back.

"AL," one said. "You really from the Anarchist League?"

"That's right," Tolby said.

"Even the girl?" The men eyed Silvia with languid greed. "Tell you what. Let us have the girl a while and we'll skip the head tax."

"Don't kid me," Tolby grunted. "Since when does the League pay head tax or any other tax?" He pushed past them impatiently. "Where's the grog shop? I'm dying!"

A two-story white building was on their left. Men lounged on the porch, watching them vacantly. Penn headed toward it and the Tolbys followed. A faded, peeling sign lettered across the front read: *Beer, Wine on Tap.*

"This is it," Penn said. He guided Silvia up the sagging steps, past the men, and inside. Tolby followed; he unstrapped his pack gratefully as he came.

The place was cool and dark. A few men and women were at the bar; the rest sat around tables. Some youths were playing throw in the back. A mechanical tune-maker wheezed and composed in the corner, a shabby, half-ruined machine only partially functioning. Behind the bar a primitive scene-shifter created and destroyed vague phantasmagoria: seascapes, mountain peaks, snowy valleys, great rolling hills, a nude woman that lingered and then dissolved into one vast breast. Dim, uncertain processions that no one noticed or looked at. The bar itself was an incredibly ancient sheet of transparent plastic, stained and chipped and yellow with age. Its n-grav coat had faded from one end; bricks now propped it up. The drink mixer had long since fallen apart. Only wine and beer were served. No living man knew how to mix the simplest drink.

Tolby moved up to the bar. "Beer," he said. "Three beers." Penn and Silvia sank down at a table and removed their packs, as the bartender served Tolby three mugs of thick, dark beer. He showed his card and carried the mugs over to the table.

The youths in the back had stopped playing. They were watching the three as they sipped their beer and unlaced their hiking boots. After a while one of them came slowly over.

"Say," he said. "You're from the League."

"That's right," Tolby murmured sleepily.

Everyone in the place was watching and listening. The youth sat down across from the three; his companions flocked excitedly around and took seats on all sides. The juveniles of the town. Bored, restless, dissatisfied. Their eyes took in the ironite staffs, the guns, the heavy metal-cleated boots. A murmured whisper rustled through them. They were about eighteen. Tanned, rangy.

"How do you get in?" one demanded bluntly.

"The League?" Tolby leaned back in his chair, found a match, and lit his cigarette. He unfastened his belt, belched loudly, and settled back contentedly. "You get in by examination."

"What do you have to know?"

Tolby shrugged. "About everything." He belched again and scratched thoughtfully at his chest, between two buttons. He was conscious of the ring of people around on all sides. A little old man with a beard and horn-rimmed glasses. At another table, a great tub of a man, in a red shirt and blue-striped trousers, with a bulging stomach.

Youths. Farmers. A Negro in a dirty white shirt and trousers, a book under his arm. A hard-jawed blonde, hair in a net, red nails and high heels, tight yellow dress. Sitting with a gray-haired businessman in a dark brown suit. A tall young man holding hands with a young black-haired

girl, huge eyes, in a soft white blouse and skirt, little slippers kicked under the table. Under the table her bare, tanned feet twisted; her slim body was bent forward with interest.

"You have to know," Tolby said, "how the League was formed. You have to know how we pulled down the governments that day. Pulled them down and destroyed them. Burned all the buildings. And all the records. Billions of microfilms and papers. Great bonfires that burned for weeks. And the swarms of little white things that poured out when we knocked the buildings over."

"You killed them?" the great tub of a man asked, lips twitching avidly.

"We let them go. They were harmless. They ran and hid. Under rocks." Tolby laughed. "Funny little scurrying things. Insects. Then we went in and gathered up all the records and equipment for making records. By God, we burned everything."

"And the robots," a youth said.

"Yeah, we smashed all the government robots. There weren't many of them. They were used only at high levels. When a lot of facts had to be integrated."

The youth's eyes bulged. "You saw them? You were there when they smashed the robots?"

Penn laughed. "Tolby means the League. That was two hundred years ago."

The youth grinned nervously. "Yeah. Tell us about the marches."

Tolby drained his mug and pushed it away. "I'm out of beer."

The mug was quickly refilled. He grunted his thanks and continued, voice deep and furry, dulled with fatigue. "The marches. That was really something, they say. All over the world, people getting up, throwing down what they were doing—"

"It started in East Germany," the hard-jawed blonde said. "The riots."

"Then it spread to Poland," the Negro put in shyly. "My grandfather used to tell me how everybody sat and listened to the television. His grandfather used to tell him. It spread to Czechoslovakia and then Austria and Roumania and Bulgaria. Then France. And Italy."

"France was first!" the little old man with beard and glasses cried violently. "They were without a government a whole month. The people saw they could live without a government!"

"The marches started it," the black-haired girl corrected. "That was the first time they started pulling down the government buildings. In East Germany and Poland. Big mobs of unorganized workers."

"Russia and America were the last," Tolby said. "When the march on Washington came there was close to twenty million of us. We were big in those days! They couldn't stop us when we finally moved."

"They shot a lot," the hard-faced blonde said.

"Sure. But the people kept coming. And yelling to the soldiers. 'Hey, Bill! Don't shoot!' 'Hey, Jack! It's me, Joe.' 'Don't shoot—we're your friends!' 'Don't kill us, join us!' And by God, after a while they did. They couldn't keep shooting their own people. They finally threw down their guns and got out of the way."

"And then you found the place," the little black-haired girl said breathlessly.

"Yeah. We found the place. Six places. Three in America. One in Britain. Two in Russia. It took us ten years to find the last place—and make sure it was the last place."

"What then?" the youth asked, bug-eyed.

"Then we busted every one of them." Tolby raised himself up, a massive man, beer mug clutched, heavy face flushed dark red. "Every damn A-bomb in the whole world."

There was an uneasy silence.

"Yeah," the youth murmured. "You sure took care of those war people."

"Won't be any more of them," the great tub of a man said. "They're gone for good."

Tolby fingered his ironite staff. "Maybe so. And maybe not. There just might be a few of them left."

"What do you mean?" the tub of a man demanded.

Tolby raised his hard gray eyes. "It's time you people stopped kidding us. You know damn well what I mean. We've heard rumors. Someplace around this area there's a bunch of them. Hiding out."

Shocked disbelief, then anger hummed to a roar. "That's a lie!" the tub of a man shouted.

"Is it?"

The little man with beard and glasses leaped up. "There's nobody here has anything to do with governments! We're all good people!"

"You better watch your step," one of the youths said softly to Tolby. "People around here don't like to be accused."

Tolby got unsteadily to his feet, his ironite staff gripped. Penn got up beside him and they stood together. "If any of you knows something," Tolby said, "you better tell it. Right now."

"Nobody knows anything," the hard-faced blonde said. "You're talking to honest folks."

"That's so," the Negro said, nodding his head. "Nobody here's doing anything wrong."

"You saved our lives," the black-haired girl said. "If you hadn't pulled down the governments we'd all be dead in the war. Why should we hold back something?"

"That's true," the great tub of a man grumbled. "We wouldn't be alive if it wasn't for the League. You think we'd do anything against the League?"



"Come on," Silvia said to her father. "Let's go." She got to her feet and tossed Penn his pack.

Tolby grunted belligerently. Finally he took his own pack and hoisted it to his shoulder. The room was deathly silent. Everyone stood frozen, as the three gathered their things and moved toward the door.

The little dark-haired girl stopped them. "The next town is thirty miles from here," she said.

"The road's blocked," her tall companion explained. "Slides closed it years ago."

"Why don't you stay with us tonight? There's plenty of room at our place. You can rest up and get an early start tomorrow."

"We don't want to impose," Silvia murmured.

Tolby and Penn glanced at each other, then at the girl. "If you're sure you have plenty of room—"

The great tub of a man approached them. "Listen. I have ten yellow slips. I want to give them to the League. I sold my farm last year. I don't need any more slips; I'm living with my brother and his family." He pushed the slips at Tolby. "Here."

Tolby pushed them back. "Keep them."

"This way," the tall young man said, as they clattered down the sagging steps, into a sudden blinding curtain of heat and dust. "We have a car. Over this way. An old gasoline car. My dad fixed it so it burns oil."

"You should have taken the slips,"

Penn said to Tolby, as they got into the ancient, battered car. Flies buzzed around them. They could hardly breathe; the car was a furnace. Silvia fanned herself with a rolled-up paper. The black-haired girl unbuttoned her blouse.

"What do we need money for?" Tolby laughed good-naturedly. "I haven't paid for anything in my life. Neither have you."

The car sputtered and moved slowly forward, onto the road. It began to gain speed. Its motor banged and roared. Soon it was moving surprisingly fast.

"You saw them," Silvia said, over the racket. "They'd give us anything they had. We saved their lives." She waved at the fields, the farmers and their crude teams, the withered crops, the sagging old farmhouses. "They'd all be dead, if it hadn't been for the League." She smashed a fly peevishly. "They depend on us."

The black-haired girl turned toward them, as the car rushed along the decaying road. Sweat streaked her tanned skin. Her half-covered breasts trembled with the motion of the car. "I'm Laura Davis. Pete and I have an old farmhouse his dad gave us when we got married."

"You can have the whole downstairs," Pete said.

"There's no electricity, but we've got a big fireplace. It gets cold at night. It's hot in the day, but when the sun sets it gets terribly cold."

"We'll be all right," Penn mur-

mured. The vibration of the car made him a little sick.

"Yes," the girl said, her black eyes flashing. Her crimson lips twisted. She leaned toward Penn intently, her small face strangely alight. "Yes, we'll take good care of you."

At that moment the car left the road.

Silvia shrieked. Tolby threw himself down, head between his knees, doubled up in a ball. A sudden curtain of green burst around Penn. Then a sickening emptiness, as the car plunged down. It struck with a roaring crash that blotted out everything. A single titanic cataclysm of fury that picked Penn up and flung his remains in every direction.

"Put me down," Bors ordered. "On this railing for a moment before I go inside."

The crew lowered him onto the concrete surface and fastened magnetic grapples into place. Men and women hurried up the wide steps, in and out of the massive building that was Bors' main offices.

The sight from these steps pleased him. He liked to stop here and look around at his world. At the civilization he had carefully constructed. Each piece added painstakingly, scrupulously, with infinite care, throughout the years.

It wasn't big. The mountains ringed it on all sides. The valley was a level bowl, surrounded by dark violet hills. Outside, beyond the hills,

the regular world began. Parched fields. Blasted, poverty-stricken towns. Decayed roads. The remains of houses, tumbled-down farm buildings. Ruined cars and machinery. Dust-covered people creeping listlessly around in hand-made clothing, dull rags and tatters.

He had seen the outside. He knew what it was like. At the mountains the blank faces, the disease, the withered crops, the crude plows and ancient tools all ended here. Here, within the ring of hills, Bors had constructed an accurate and detailed reproduction of a society two centuries gone. The world as it had been in the old days. The time of governments. The time that had been pulled down by the Anarchist League.

Within his five synopsis-coils the plans, knowledge, information, blueprints of a whole world existed. In the two centuries he had carefully recreated that world, had made this miniature society that glittered and hummed on all sides of him. The roads, buildings, houses, industries of a dead world, all a fragment of the past, built with his own hands, his own metal fingers and brain.

"Fowler," Bors said.

Fowler came over. He looked haggard. His eyes were red-rimmed and swollen. "What is it? You want to go inside?"

Overhead, the morning patrol thundered past. A string of black dots against the sunny, cloudless

sky. Bors watched with satisfaction. "Quite a sight."

"Right on the nose," Fowler agreed, examining his wristwatch. To their right, a column of heavy tanks snaked along, a highway between green fields. Their gunsnouts glittered. Behind them a column of foot soldiers marched, faces hidden behind bacteria masks.

"I'm thinking," Bors said, "that it may be unwise to trust Green any longer."

"Why the hell do you say that?"

"Every ten days I'm inactivated. So your crew can see what repairs are needed." Bors twisted restlessly. "For twelve hours I'm completely helpless. Green takes care of me. Sees nothing happens. But—"

"But what?"

"It occurs to me perhaps there'd be more safety in a squad of troops. It's too much of a temptation for one man, alone."

Fowler scowled. "I don't see that. How about me? I have charge of inspecting you. I could switch a few leads around. Send a load through your synopsis-coils. Blow them out."

Bors whirled wildly, then subsided. "True. You could do that." After a moment he demanded, "But what would you gain? You know I'm the only one who can keep all this together. I'm the only one who knows how to maintain a planned society, not a disorderly chaos! If it weren't for me, all this would collapse, and you'd have dust and ruins and weeds.

The whole outside would come rushing in to take over!"

"Of course. So why worry about Green?"

Trucks of workers rumbled past. Loads of men in blue-green, sleeves rolled up, armloads of tools. A mining team, heading for the mountains.

"Take me inside," Bors said abruptly.

Fowler called McLean. They hoisted Bors and carried him past the throngs of people, into the building, down the corridor and to his office. Officials and technicians moved respectfully out of the way, as the great pitted, corroded tank was carried past.

"All right," Bors said impatiently. "That's all. You can go."

Fowler and McLean left the luxurious office, with its lush carpets, furniture, drapes and rows of books. Bors was already bent over his desk, sorting through heaps of reports and papers.

Fowler shook his head, as they walked down the hall. "He won't last much longer."

"The motor system? Can't we reinforce the—"

"I don't mean that. He's breaking up mentally. He can't take the strain any longer."

"None of us can," McLean muttered.

"Running this thing is too much for him. Knowing it's all dependent on him. Knowing as soon as he turns his back or lets down it'll begin to

come apart at the seams. A hell of a job, trying to shut out the real world. Keeping his model universe running."

"He's gone on a long time," McLean said.

Fowler brooded. "Sooner or later we're going to have to face the situation." Gloomily, he ran his fingers along the blade of a large screwdriver. "He's wearing out. Sooner or later somebody's going to have to step in. As he continues to decay . . ." He stuck the screwdriver back in his belt, with his pliers and hammer and soldering iron. "One crossed wire."

"What's that?"

Fowler laughed. "Now he's got me doing it. One crossed wire and —*poof*. But what then? That's the big question."

"Maybe," McLean said softly, "you and I can then get off this rat race. You and I and all the rest of us. And live like human beings."

"*Rat race*," Fowler murmured. "Rats in a maze. Doing tricks. Performing chores thought up by somebody else."

McLean caught Fowler's eye. "By somebody of another species."

Tolby struggled vaguely. Silence. A faint dripping close by. A beam pinned his body down. He was caught on all sides by the twisted wreck of the car. He was head down. The car was turned on its side. Off the road in a gully, wedged between

two huge trees. Bent struts and smashed metal all around him. And bodies.

He pushed up with all his strength. The beam gave, and he managed to get to a sitting position. A tree branch had burst in the windshield. The black-haired girl, still turned toward the back seat, was impaled on it. The branch had driven through her spine, out her chest, and into the seat; she clutched at it with both hands, head limp, mouth half-open. The man beside her was also dead. His hands were gone; the windshield had burst around him. He lay in a heap among the remains of the dashboard and the bloody shine of his own internal organs.

Penn was dead. Neck snapped like a rotten broom handle. Tolby pushed his corpse aside and examined his daughter. Silvia didn't stir. He put his ear to her shirt and listened. She was alive. Her heart beat faintly. Her bosom rose and fell against his ear.

He wound a handkerchief around her arm, where the flesh was ripped open and oozing blood. She was badly cut and scratched; one leg was doubled under her, obviously broken. Her clothes were ripped, her hair matted with blood. But she was alive. He pushed the twisted door open and stumbled out. A fiery tongue of afternoon sunlight struck him and he winced. He began to ease her limp body out of the car, past the twisted door-frame.

A sound.

Tolby glanced up, rigid. Something was coming. A whirring insect that rapidly descended. He let go of Silvia, crouched, glanced around, then lumbered awkwardly down the gully. He slid and fell and rolled among the green vines and jagged gray boulders. His gun gripped, he lay gasping in the moist shadows, peering upward.

The insect landed. A small airship, jet-driven. The sight stunned him. He had heard about jets, seen photographs of them. Been briefed and lectured in the history-indoctrination courses at the League Camps. But to *see* a jet!

Men swarmed out. Uniformed men who started from the road, down the side of the gully, bodies crouched warily as they approached the wrecked car. They lugged heavy rifles. They looked grim and experienced, as they tore the car doors open and scrambled in.

"One's gone," a voice drifted to him.

"Must be around somewhere."

"Look, this one's alive! This woman. Started to crawl out. The rest all dead."

Furious cursing. "Damn Laura! She should have leaped! The fanatic little fool!"

"Maybe she didn't have time. God's sake, the thing's all the way through her." Horror and shocked dismay. "We won't hardly be able to get her loose."

"Leave her." The officer directing things waved the men back out of the car. "Leave them all."

"How about this wounded one?"

The leader hesitated. "Kill her," he said finally. He snatched a rifle and raised the butt. "The rest of you fan out and try to get the other one. He's probably—"

Tolby fired, and the leader's body broke in half. The lower part sank down slowly; the upper dissolved in ashy fragments. Tolby turned and began to move in a slow circle, firing as he crawled. He got two more of them before the rest retreated in panic to their jet-powered insect and slammed the lock.

He had the element of surprise. Now that was gone. They had strength and numbers. He was doomed. Already, the insect was rising. They'd be able to spot him easily from above. But he had saved Silvia. That was something.

He stumbled down a dried-up creek bed. He ran aimlessly; he had no place to go. He didn't know the countryside, and he was on foot. He slipped on a stone and fell headlong. Pain and billowing darkness beat at him as he got unsteadily to his knees. His gun was gone, lost in the shrubbery. He spat broken teeth and blood. He peered wildly up at the blazing afternoon sky.

The insect was leaving. It hummed off toward the distant hills. It dwindled, became a black ball, a fly-speck, then disappeared.

Tolby waited a moment. Then he struggled up the side of the ravine to the wrecked car. They had gone to get help. They'd be back. Now was his only chance. If he could get Silvia out and down the road, into hiding. Maybe to a farmhouse. Back to town.

He reached the car and stood, dazed and stupefied. Three bodies remained, the two in the front seat, Penn in the back. But Silvia was gone.

They had taken her with them. Back where they came from. She had been dragged to the jet-driven insect; a trail of blood led from the car up the side of the gully to the highway.

With a violent shudder Tolby pulled himself together. He climbed into the car and pried loose Penn's gun from his belt. Silvia's ironite staff rested on the seat; he took that, too. Then he started off down the road, walking without haste, carefully, slowly.

An ironic thought plucked at his mind. He had found what they were after. The men in uniform. They were organized, responsible to a central authority. In a newly-assembled jet.

Beyond the hills was a government.

"Sir," Green said. He smoothed his short blond hair anxiously, his young face twisting.

Technicians and experts and or-

dinary people in droves were everywhere. The offices buzzed and echoed with the business of the day. Green pushed through the crowd and to the desk where Bors sat, propped up by two magnetic frames.

"Sir," Green said. "Something's happened."

Bors looked up. He pushed a metal-foil slate away and laid down his stylus. His eye cells clicked and flickered; deep inside his battered trunk motor gears whined. "What is it?"

Green came close. There was something in his face, an expression Bors had never seen before. A look of fear and glassy determination. A glazed, fanatic cast, as if his flesh had hardened to rock. "Sir, scouts contacted a League team moving North. They met the team outside Fairfax. The incident took place directly beyond the first road block."

Bors said nothing. On all sides, officials, experts, farmers, workmen, industrial managers, soldiers, people of all kinds buzzed and murmured and pushed forward impatiently. Trying to get to Bors' desk. Loaded down with problems to be solved, situations to be explained. The pressing business of the day. Roads, factories, disease control. Repairs. Construction. Manufacture. Design. Planning. Urgent problems for Bors to consider and deal with. Problems that couldn't wait.

"Was the League team destroyed?" Bors asked.

"One was killed. One was wound-

ed and brought here." Green hesitated. "One escaped."

For a long time Bors was silent. Around him the people murmured and shuffled; he ignored them. All at once he pulled the vidscanner to him and snapped the circuit open. "One escaped? I don't like the sound of that."

"He shot three members of our scout unit. Including the leader. The others got frightened. They grabbed the injured girl and returned here."

Bors' massive head lifted. "They made a mistake. They should have located the one who escaped."

"This was the first time the situation—"

"I know," Bors said. "But it was an error. Better not to have touched them at all, than to have taken two and allowed the third to get away." He turned to the vidscanner. "Sound an emergency alert. Close down the factories. Arm the work crews and any male farmers capable of using weapons. Close every road. Remove the women and children to the undersurface shelters. Bring up the heavy guns and supplies. Suspend all non-military production and—" He considered. "Arrest everyone we're not sure of. On the C sheet. Have them shot." He snapped the scanner off.

"What'll happen?" Green demanded, shaken.

"The thing we've prepared for. Total war."

"We have weapons!" Green

shouted excitedly. "In an hour there'll be ten thousand men ready to fight. We have jet-driven ships. Heavy artillery. Bombs. Bacteria pellets. What's the League? A lot of people with packs on their backs!"

"Yes," Bors said. "A lot of people with packs on their backs."

"How can they do anything? How can a bunch of anarchists organize? They have no structure, no control, no central power."

"They have the whole world. A billion people."

"*Individuals!* A club, not subject to law. Voluntary membership. We have a disciplined organization. Every aspect of our economic life operates at maximum efficiency. We—you—have your thumb on everything. All you have to do is give the order. Set the machine in motion."

Bors nodded slowly. "It's true the anarchist can't coordinate. The League can't organize in an efficient structure. It's a paradox. Government by anarchists . . . Anti-government, actually. Instead of governing the world they tramp around to make sure no one else does."

"Dog in the manger."

"As you say, they're actually a voluntary club of totally unorganized individuals. Without law or central authority. They maintain no society—they can't govern. All they can do is interfere with anyone else who tries. Troublemakers. But—"

"But what?"

"It was this way before. Two cen-

turies ago. They were unorganized. Unarmed. Vast mobs, without discipline or authority. Yet they pulled down all the governments. All over the world."

"We've got a whole army. All the roads are mined. Heavy guns. Bombs. Pellets. Every one of us is a soldier. We're an armed camp!"

Bors was deep in thought. "You say one of them is here? One of the League agents?"

"A young woman."

Bors signalled the nearby maintenance crew. "Take me to her. I want to talk to her in the time remaining."

Silvia watched silently, as the uniformed men pushed and grunted their way into the room. They staggered over to the bed, pulled two chairs together, and carefully laid down their massive armload.

Quickly they snapped protective struts into place, locked the chairs together, threw magnetic grapples into operation, and then warily retreated.

"All right," the robot said. "You can go." The men left. Bors turned to face the woman on the bed.

"A machine," Silvia whispered, white-faced. "You're a machine."

Bors nodded slightly without speaking.

Silvia shifted uneasily on the bed. She was weak. One leg was in a transparent plastic cast. Her face was bandaged and her right arm

ached and throbbed. Outside the window, the late afternoon sun sprinkled through the drapes. Flowers bloomed. Grass. Hedges. And beyond the hedges, buildings and factories.

For the last hour the sky had been filled with jet-driven ships. Great flocks that raced excitedly across the sky toward distant hills. Along the highway cars hurtled, dragging guns and heavy military equipment. Men were marching in close rank, rows of gray-clad soldiers, guns and helmets and bacteria masks. Endless lines of figures, identical in their uniforms, stamped from the same matrix.

"There are a lot of them," Bors said, indicating the marching men.

"Yes." Silvia watched a couple of soldiers hurry by the window. Youths with worried expressions on their smooth faces. Helmets bobbing at their waists. Long rifles. Canteens. Counters. Radiation shields. Bacteria masks wound awkwardly around their necks, ready to go into place. They were scared. Hardly more than kids. Others followed. A truck roared into life. The soldiers were swept off to join the others.

"They're going to fight," Bors said, "to defend their homes and factories."

"All this equipment. You manufacture it, don't you?"

"That's right. Our industrial organization is perfect. We're totally



productive. Our society here is operated rationally. Scientifically. We're fully prepared to meet this emergency."

Suddenly Silvia realized what the emergency was. "The League! One of us must have got away." She pulled herself up. "Which of them? Penn or my father?"

"I don't know," the robot murmured indifferently.

Horror and disgust choked Silvia. "My God," she said softly. "You have no understanding of us. You run all this, and you're incapable of empathy. You're nothing but a mechanical computer. One of the old government integration robots."

"That's right. Two centuries old."

She was appalled. "And you've been alive all this time. We thought we destroyed all of you!"

"I was missed. I had been damaged. I wasn't in my place. I was in a truck, on my way out of Washington. I saw the mobs and escaped."

"Two hundred years ago. Legendary times. You actually saw the events they tell us about. The old days. The great marches. The day the governments fell."

"Yes. I saw it all. A group of us formed in Virginia. Experts, officials, skilled workmen. Later we came here. It was remote enough, off the beaten path."

"We heard rumors. A fragment . . . Still maintaining itself. But we didn't know where or how."

"I was fortunate," Bors said. "I escaped by a fluke. All the others were destroyed. It's taken a long time to organize what you see here. Fifteen miles from here is a ring of hills. This valley is a bowl—mountains on all sides. We've set up road blocks in the form of natural slides. Nobody comes here. Even in Fairfax, thirty miles off, they know nothing."

"That girl. Laura."

"Scouts. We keep scout teams in all inhabited regions within a hundred mile radius. As soon as you entered Fairfax, word was relayed to us. An air unit was dispatched. To avoid questions, we arranged to have you killed in an auto wreck. But one of you escaped."

Silvia shook her head, bewildered. "How?" she demanded. "How do you keep going? Don't the people revolt?" She struggled to a sitting position. "They must know what's happened everywhere else. How do you control them? They're going out now, in their uniforms. But—*will they fight? Can you count on them?*"

Bors answered slowly. "They trust me," he said. "I brought with me a vast amount of knowledge. Information and techniques lost to the rest of the world. Are jet-ships and vidscanners and power cables made anywhere else in the world? I retain all that knowledge. I have memory units, synopsis-coils. Because of me they have these things. Things you

know only as dim memories, vague legends."

"What happens when you die?"

"I won't die! I'm eternal!"

"You're wearing out. You have to be carried around. And your right arm. You can hardly move it!" Silvia's voice was harsh, ruthless. "Your whole tank is pitted and rusty."

The robot whirred; for a moment he seemed unable to speak. "My knowledge remains," he grated finally. "I'll always be able to communicate. Fowler has arranged a broadcast system. Even when I talk—" He broke off. "Even then. Everything is under control. I've organized every aspect of the situation. I've maintained this system for two centuries. It's got to be kept going!"

Silvia lashed out. It happened in a split second. The boot of her cast caught the chairs on which the robot rested. She thrust violently with her foot and hands; the chairs teetered, hesitated—

"Fowler!" the robot screamed.

Silvia pushed with all her strength. Blinding agony seared through her leg; she bit her lip and threw her shoulder against the robot's pitted hulk. He waved his arms, whirled wildly, and then the two chairs slowly collapsed. The robot slid quietly from them, over on his back, his arms still waving helplessly.

Silvia dragged herself from the bed. She managed to pull herself to

the window; her broken leg hung uselessly, a dead weight in its transparent plastic cast. The robot lay like some futile bug, arms waving, eye-lens clicking, its rusty works whirring in fear and rage.

"Fowler!" it screamed again. "Help me!"

Silvia reached the window. She tugged at the locks; they were sealed. She grabbed up a lamp from the table and threw it against the glass. The glass burst around her, a shower of lethal fragments. She stumbled forward—and then the repair crew was pouring into the room.

Fowler gasped at the sight of the robot on its back. A strange expression crossed his face. "Look at him!"

"Help me!" the robot shrieked. "Help me!"

One of the men grabbed Silvia around the waist and logged her back to the bed. She kicked and bit, sunk her nails into the man's cheek. He threw her on the bed, face down, and drew his pistol. "Stay there," he gasped.

The others were bent over the robot, getting him to an upright position.

"What happened?" Fowler said. He came over to the bed, his face twisting. "Did he fall?"

Silvia's eyes glowed with hatred and despair. "I pushed him over. I almost got there." Her chest heaved. "The window. But my leg—"

"Get me back to my quarters!" Bors cried.

The crew gathered him up and carried him down the hall, to his private office. A few moments later he was sitting shakily at his desk, his mechanism pounding wildly, surrounded by his papers and memoranda.

He forced down his panic and tried to resume his work. He had to keep going. His vidscreen was alive with activity. The whole system was in motion. He blankly watched a subcommander sending up a cloud of black dots, jet bombers that shot up like flies and headed quickly off.

The system had to be preserved. He repeated it again and again. He had to save it. Had to organize the people and make *them* save it. If the people didn't fight, wasn't everything doomed?

Fury and desperation overwhelmed him. The system couldn't preserve itself; it wasn't a thing apart, something that could be separated from the people who lived it. Actually it *was* the people. They were identical; when the people fought to preserve the system they were fighting to preserve nothing less than themselves.

They existed only as long as the system existed.

He caught sight of a marching column of white-faced troops, moving toward the hills. His ancient synapsis-coils radiated and shuddered uncertainly, then fell back into pattern. He was two centuries old. He

had come into existence a long time ago, in a different world. That world had created him; through him that world still lived. As long as he existed, that world existed. In miniature, it still functioned. His model universe, his recreation. His rational, controlled world, in which each aspect was fully organized, fully analyzed and integrated.

He kept a rational, progressive world alive. A humming oasis of productivity on a dusty, parched planet of decay and silence.

Bors spread out his papers and went to work on the most pressing problem. The transformation from a peace-time economy to full military mobilization. Total military organization of every man, woman, child, piece of equipment and dyne of energy under his direction.

Edward Tolby emerged cautiously. His clothes were torn and ragged. He had lost his pack, crawling through the brambles and vines. His face and hands were bleeding. He was utterly exhausted.

Below him lay a valley. A vast bowl. Fields, houses, highways. Factories. Equipment. Men.

He had been watching the men three hours. Endless streams of them, pouring from the valley into the hills, along the roads and paths. On foot, in trucks, in cars, armored tanks, weapons carriers. Overhead, in fast little jet-fighters and great lumbering bombers. Gleaming ships

that took up positions above the troops and prepared for battle.

Battle in the grand style. The two-centuries-old full-scale war that was supposed to have disappeared. But here it was, a vision from the past. He had seen this in the old tapes and records, used in the camp orientation courses. A ghost army resurrected to fight again. A vast host of men and guns, prepared to fight and die.

Tolby climbed down cautiously. At the foot of a slope of boulders a soldier had halted his motorcycle and was setting up a communications antenna and transmitter. Tolby circled, crouched, expertly approached him. A blond-haired youth, fumbling nervously with the wires and relays, licking his lips uneasily, glancing up and grabbing for his rifle at every sound.

Tolby took a deep breath. The youth had turned his back; he was tracing a power circuit. It was now or never. With one stride Tolby stepped out, raised his pistol and fired. The clump of equipment and the soldier's rifle vanished.

"Don't make a sound," Tolby said. He peered around. No one had seen; the main line was half a mile to his right. The sun was setting. Great shadows were falling over the hills. The fields were rapidly fading from brown-green to a deep violet. "Put your hands up over your head, clasp them, and get down on your knees."

The youth tumbled down in a

frightened heap. "What are you going to do?" He saw the ironite staff, and the color left his face. "You're a League agent!"

"Shut up," Tolby ordered. "First, outline your system of responsibility. *Who's your superior?*"

The youth stuttered forth what he knew. Tolby listened intently. He was satisfied. The usual monolithic structure. Exactly what he wanted.

"At the top," he broke in. "At the top of the pillar. Who has ultimate responsibility?"

"Bors."

"Bors!" Tolby scowled. "That doesn't sound like a name. Sounds like—" He broke off, staggered. "We should have guessed! An old government robot. Still functioning."

The youth saw his chance. He leaped up and darted frantically away.

Tolby shot him above the left ear. The youth pitched over on his face and lay still. Tolby hurried to him and quickly pulled off his dark gray uniform. It was too small for him of course. But the motorcycle was just right. He'd seen tapes of them; he'd wanted one since he was a child. A fast little motorcycle to propel his weight around. Now he had it.

Half an hour later he was roaring down a smooth, broad highway toward the center of the valley and the buildings that rose against the dark sky. His headlights cut into the blackness; he still wobbled from

side to side, but for all practical purposes he had the hang of it. He increased speed; the road shot by, trees and fields, haystacks, stalled farm equipment. All traffic was going against him, troops hurrying to the front.

The front. Lemmings going out into the ocean to drown. A thousand, ten thousand, metal-clad fingers, armed and alert. Weighted down with guns and bombs and flame throwers and bacteria pellets.

There was only one hitch. No army opposed them. A mistake had been made. It took two sides to make a war; and only one had been resurrected.

A mile outside the concentration of buildings he pulled his motorcycle off the road and carefully hid it in a haystack. For a moment he considered leaving his ironite staff. Then he shrugged and grabbed it up, along with his pistol. He always carried his staff; it was the League symbol. It represented the walking Anarchists who patrolled the world on foot, the world's protection agency.

He loped through the darkness toward the outline ahead. There were fewer men here. He saw no women or children. Ahead, charged wire was set up. Troops crouched behind it, armed to the teeth. A searchlight moved back and forth across the road. Behind it, radar vanes loomed and behind them an ugly square of concrete. The great

offices from which the government was run.

For a time he watched the searchlight. Finally he had its motion plotted. In its glare, the faces of the troops stood out, pale and drawn. Youths. They had never fought. This was their first encounter. They were terrified.

When the light was off him, he stood up and advanced toward the wire. Automatically, a breach was slid back for him. Two guards raised up and awkwardly crossed bayonets ahead of him.

"Show your papers!" one demanded. Young lieutenants. Boys, white-lipped, nervous. Playing soldier.

Pity and contempt made Tolby laugh harshly and push forward. "Get out of my way."

One anxiously flashed a pocket light. "Halt! What's the code-key for this watch?" He blocked Tolby's way with his bayonet, hands twisting convulsively.

Tolby reached in his pocket, pulled out his pistol, and as the searchlight started to swerve back, blasted the two guards. The bayonets clattered down and he dived forward. Yells and shapes rose on all sides. Anguished, terrified shouts. Random firing. The night was lit up, as he dashed and crouched, turned a corner past a supply warehouse, raced up a flight of stairs and into the massive building ahead.

He had to work fast. Gripping

his ironite staff, he plunged down a gloomy corridor. His boots echoed. Men poured into the building behind him. Bolts of energy thundered past him; a whole section of the ceiling burst into ash and collapsed behind him.

He reached stairs and climbed rapidly. He came to the next floor and groped for the door handle. Something flickered behind him. He half-turned, his gun quickly up—

A stunning blow sent him sprawling. He crashed against the wall; his gun flew from his fingers. A shape bent over him, rifle gripped. "Who are you? What are you doing up here?"

Not a soldier. A stubble-chinned man in stained shirt and rumpled trousers. Eyes puffy and red. A belt of tools, hammer, pliers, screwdriver, a soldering iron, around his waist.

Tolby raised himself up painfully. "If you didn't have that rifle—"

Fowler backed warily away. "Who are you? This floor is forbidden to troops of the line. You know this—" Then he saw the ironite staff. "By God," he said softly. "You're the one they didn't get." He laughed shakily. "You're the one who got away."

Tolby's fingers tightened around the staff, but Fowler reacted instantly. The snout of the rifle jerked up, on a line with Tolby's face.

"Be careful," Fowler warned. He turned slightly; soldiers were hurrying up the stairs, boots drumming,

echoing shouts ringing. For a moment he hesitated, then waved his rifle toward the stairs ahead. "Up. Get going."

Tolby blinked. "What—"

"Up!" The rifle snout jabbed into Tolby. "Hurry!"

Bewildered, Tolby hurried up the stairs, Fowler close behind him. At the third floor Fowler pushed him roughly through the doorway, the snout of his rifle digging urgently into his back. He found himself in a corridor of doors. Endless offices.

"Keep going," Fowler snarled. "Down the hall. Hurry!"

Tolby hurried, his mind spinning. "What the hell are you—"

"I could never do it," Fowler gasped, close to his ear. "Not in a million years. But it's got to be done."

Tolby halted. "What is this?"

They faced each other defiantly, faces contorted, eyes blazing. "He's in there," Fowler snapped, indicating a door with his rifle. "You have one chance. Take it."

For a fraction of a second Tolby hesitated. Then he broke away. "Okay. I'll take it."

Fowler followed after him. "Be careful. Watch your step. There's a series of check points. Keep going straight, in all the way. As far as you can go. And for God's sake, hurry!"

His voice faded, as Tolby gained speed. He reached the door and tore it open.

Soldiers and officials ballooned. He threw himself against them; they sprawled and scattered. He scrambled on, as they struggled up and stupidly fumbled for their guns. Through another door, into an inner office, past a desk where a frightened girl sat, eyes wide, mouth open. Then a third door, into an alcove.

A wild-faced youth leaped up and snatched frantically for his pistol. Tolby was unarmed, trapped in the alcove. Figures already pushed against the door behind him. He gripped his ironite staff and backed away as the blond-haired fanatic fired blindly. The bolt burst a foot away; it flicked him with a tongue of heat.

"You dirty anarchist!" Green screamed. His face distorted, he fired again and again. "You murdering anarchist spy!"

Tolby hurled his ironite staff. He put all his strength in it; the staff leaped through the air in a whistling arc, straight at the youth's head. Green saw it coming and ducked. Agile and quick, he jumped away, grinning humorlessly. The staff crashed against the wall and rolled clanging to the floor.

"Your walking staff!" Green gasped and fired.

The bolt missed him on purpose. Green was playing games with him. Tolby bent down and groped frantically for the staff. He picked it up. Green watched, face rigid, eyes glittering. "Throw it again!" he snarled.

Tolby leaped. He took the youth by surprise. Green grunted, stumbled back from the impact, then suddenly fought with maniacal fury.

Tolby was heavier. But he was exhausted. He had crawled hours, beat his way through the mountains, walked endlessly. He was at the end of his strength. The car wreck, the days of walking. Green was in perfect shape. His wiry, agile body twisted away. His hands came up. Fingers dug into Tolby's windpipe; he kicked the youth in the groin. Green staggered back, convulsed and bent over with pain.

"All right," Green gasped, face ugly and dark. His hand fumbled with his pistol. The barrel came up.

Half of Green's head dissolved. His hands opened and his gun fell to the floor. His body stood for a moment, then settled down in a heap, like an empty suit of clothes.

Tolby caught a glimpse of a rifle snout pushed past him—and the man with the tool belt. The man waved him on frantically. "Hurry!"

Tolby raced down a carpeted hall, between two great flickering yellow lamps. A crowd of officials and soldiers stumbled uncertainly after him, shouting and firing at random. He tore open a thick oak door and halted.

He was in a luxurious chamber. Drapes, rich wallpaper. Lamps. Bookcases. A glimpse of the finery of the past. The wealth of the old days. Thick carpets. Warm radiant

heat. A vidscreen. At the far end, a huge mahogany desk.

At the desk a figure sat. Working on heaps of papers and reports, piled masses of material. The figure contrasted starkly with the lushness of the furnishings. It was a great pitted, corroded tank of metal. Bent and greenish, patched and repaired. An ancient machine.

"Is that you, Fowler?" the robot demanded.

Tolby advanced, his ironite staff gripped.

The robot turned angrily. "Who is it? Get Green and carry me down into the shelter. One of the road-blocks has reported a League agent already—" The robot broke off. Its cold, mechanical eye-lens bored up at the man. It clicked and whirled in uneasy astonishment. "I don't know you."

It saw the ironite staff.

"League agent," the robot said. "You're the one who got through." Comprehension came. "*The third one*. You came here. You didn't go back." Its metal fingers fumbled clumsily at the objects on the desk, then in the drawer. It found a gun and raised it awkwardly.

Tolby knocked the gun away; it clattered to the floor. "Run!" he shouted at the robot. "Start running!"

It remained. Tolby's staff came down. The fragile, complex brain-unit of the robot burst apart. Coils, wiring, relay fluid, spattered over his

arms and hands. The robot shuddered. Its machinery thrashed. It half-rose from its chair, then swayed and toppled. It crashed full length on the floor, parts and gears rolling in all directions.

"Good God," Tolby said, suddenly seeing it for the first time. Shakingly, he bent over its remains. "It was crippled."

Men were all around him. "He's killed Bors!" Shocked, dazed faces. "Bors is dead!"

Fowler came up slowly. "You got him, all right. There's nothing left now."

Tolby stood holding his ironite staff in his hands. "The poor blasted thing," he said softly. "Completely helpless. Sitting there and I came and killed him. He didn't have a chance."

The building was bedlam. Soldiers and officials scurried crazily about, grief-stricken, hysterical. They bumped into each other, gathered in knots, shouted and gave meaningless orders.

Tolby pushed past them; nobody paid any attention to him. Fowler was gathering up the remains of the robot. Collecting the smashed pieces and bits. Tolby stopped beside him. Like Humpty-Dumpty, pulled down off his wall he'd never be back together, not now.

"Where's the woman?" he asked Fowler. "The League agent they brought in."



Fowler straightened up slowly. "I'll take you." He led Tolby down the packed, surging hall, to the hospital wing of the building.

Silvia sat up apprehensively as the two men entered the room. "What's going on?" She recognized her father. "Dad! Thank God! It was you who got out."

Tolby slammed the door against the chaos of sound hammering up and down the corridor. "How are you? How's your leg?"

"Mending. What happened?"

"I got him. The robot. He's dead."

For a moment the three of them were silent. Outside, in the halls, men ran frantically back and forth. Word had already leaked out. Troops gathered in huddled knots outside the building. Lost men, wandering away from their posts. Uncertain. Aimless.

"It's over," Fowler said.

Tolby nodded. "I know."

"They'll get tired of crouching in their foxholes," Fowler said. "They'll come filtering back. As soon as the news reaches them, they'll desert and throw away their equipment."

"Good," Tolby grunted. "The sooner the better." He touched Fowler's rifle. "You, too, I hope."

Silvia hesitated. "Do you think—"

"Think what?"

"Did we make a mistake?"

Tolby grinned wearily. "Hell of a time to think about that."

"He was doing what he thought was right. They built up their homes

and factories. This whole area . . . They turn out a lot of goods. I've been watching through the window. It's made me think. They've done so much. Made so much."

"Made a lot of guns," Tolby said.

"We have guns, too. We kill and destroy. We have all the disadvantages and none of the advantages."

"We don't have war," Tolby answered quietly. "To defend this neat little organization there are ten thousand men up there in those hills. All waiting to fight. Waiting to drop their bombs and bacteria pellets, to keep this place running. But they won't. Pretty soon they'll give up and start to trickle back."

"This whole system will decay rapidly," Fowler said. "He was already losing his control. He couldn't keep the clock back much longer."

"Anyhow, it's done," Silvia murmured. "We did our job." She smiled a little. "Bors did his job and we did ours. But the times were against him and with us."

"That's right," Tolby agreed. "We did our job. And we'll never be sorry."

Fowler said nothing. He stood with his hands in his pockets, gazing silently out the window. His fingers were touching something. Three undamaged synopsis-coils. Intact memory elements from the dead robot, snatched from the scattered remains.

*Just in case, he said to himself.  
Just in case the times change. • • •*



# CONTROLLED

EVEN THE MOST RIGID SCIENTIFIC CONTROL CANNOT ALWAYS

**T**HIS was my first trip in almost two hundred years.

I hurried out of the ship and tasted the night air. At first, it was so good to be alive again that I couldn't think of anything else. The ship lifted silently back into the darkness.

I stood in a field of grass, alone with the wind and the stars. I could smell night flowers and the hint of distant rain. I didn't want to think. I only wanted to live.

It isn't easy to come back from the dead.

The nagging, urgent thoughts forced themselves back into my brain. *No time for living, not for you, not now*, they whispered. *You've got your job to do. You've got to find the answer, and find it fast.*

Well, enough of that.

This job is rough enough without being maudlin about it.



by Chad Oliver

# EXPERIMENT

## ELIMINATE—HEARTBREAK

I smiled a little, feeling more like myself. I set out over the fields and the hills until I came to the highway, winding along like a curving ribbon across the land. I hesitated.

What if they spotted me too soon? What if I couldn't get back?

The hell with that.

I took the highway into the town. When I got to the town, I started looking for the answer. I stayed for two years. It was a nice little town,

with clean streets and warm houses and friendly people.

Suppose *you* were sent into a culture that had not changed for one hundred and fifty years. Suppose you were looking for change, any change. Suppose you had to find it, for yourself as well as for others.

Where would you look?

You can't answer that intelligently without some information, of course. I'll tell you this much: the people here are incapable of producing space travel or nuclear fission, and mutations are impossible

with their genetic structures. I'll tell you a little more: the name of this world is Orll, the people who live on it are artificial humanoids, and the whole thing is part of an experiment.

Where would you look, and what would you do?

I lived in an apartment house and talked to the tenants.

I made friends with government workers and pumped them for what they knew.

I went to the shows, read the papers, lived the life.

There was a girl again. I tried not to love her.

When the two years were up, I was in the deserted field of grass right on time. The pickup ship came back for me. Once, ten thousand years ago, I was late when a pickup ship came.

I'll never do *that* again.

It's possible that I picked up something useful, something that I'm not equipped to understand. If so, they can read it out of me when I get back. But as far as I'm concerned, I drew a big fat nothing.

That hurt. I *had* to find the answer, and find it fast.

Up, up, and back to the Great Ship. I hated to go inside. I hated to be slowed down again. Not that I had any choice in the matter, dammit.

They adjusted me back to ship time.

I went into the Great Ship and

reported verbally. I told them what I knew, which wasn't much, believe me. Then they took my tapes out and studied them.

Nothing.

I knew it.

What the devil was happening on Orll? No change to speak of there for a hundred and fifty years, and in two more years right down there with them I had spotted nothing. It didn't make sense. Living cultures *had* to change.

And Orll was still alive. I clenched my fists. It was alive, it *had* to be alive—

I was as confused as the Men. They left me in the conference room for the twelve-hour report. Old Steve Harcourt said he might want to ask me something, but I was never really activated. I know Old Steve. He didn't need me at all, God knows, but he knew I'd be interested in hearing what went on.

Steve is one hell of a nice guy.

I stood there in the corner, my two feet of height dwarfed by the Men. The conference wasn't much, actually. The same old thing. The scientists assigned to the Orll project sat around and read the computer reports, which presented a concise summary followed by thirty pages of details. The summary read: **THERE HAS BEEN NO PERCEPTIBLE CHANGE ON ORLL FOR TWELVE HOURS.**

Naturally, twelve hours on Orll was the equivalent of about a year

and a half on Earth. I had only left the Great Ship a little over twelve hours ago, ship time. The important thing was that the summary report had now been exactly the same every twelve hours for three weeks.

No change for three generations, then. No change at all in roughly seventy-five years. And, before that, no change to speak of for fifty years.

The scientists hashed over all the old questions, and came up with the old answers. When it was over, Steve picked me up and carried me down to the Peeping Tom.

Steve set me on the floor, apparently absent-mindedly.

But he knew I was watching and listening.

This is what I saw and heard:

*The tension in the viewer room, generally referred to as the Peeping Tom, was part of the furniture. It didn't shriek and it didn't holler, but it was solidly there.*

*Steve Harcourt looked at his chair before his viewer screen and clipped the phones over his ears. He didn't turn the sound on, however, and the screen stayed blank.*

*He leaned back comfortably, smiled at the little contact humanoid standing silently by his chair, and looked around. As usual, the Peeping Tom was packed to the rafters. Banks of viewscreens crawled with vivid, rushing life and the scientists stared at the screens, almost desperately.*

*...Searching for the answer, Harcourt thought. Searching for the little answer that wasn't there.*

*The men and women of the Orll project sat back in their padded chairs and smoked and photographed and observed and scribbled. It was quiet, since the sound pickups came in over individual earphones. Outwardly, the mood of the place was relaxed and informal.*

*Steve Harcourt looked at his hands. They were old hands now, with the veins getting a little too prominent. Old hands, aged by forty-one years as director of the Orll experiment. Old hands, but still steady, still strong, still capable. He looked particularly at the index finger of his right hand. That was the one he would have to use. Just touch the red button, just push it a fraction—*

*And no more Orll.*

*Unless they could find the answer, and find it soon.*

*After they had built Orll and stocked it with rapidly living humanoids, they had pushed and prodded the growing native culture to make it conform in its broad outlines to fifty thousand years of history on Earth. In forty-one years, Orll had developed from the hunting cultures of the Upper Paleolithic through the dawn of recorded history and on to an approximation of contemporary times, an approximation without space travel or nuclear fission, for obvious reasons.*

Now, in the year 2051, Orll caught up with the Earth chronologically. On Earth it was 2051—and on Orll it was 2176. There was no history now to serve as a guide. The scientists could no longer interfere and direct; Orll had to be left strictly to her own devices. The most valuable data imaginable could be obtained by finding out what the future of Orll would be like.

But Orll didn't seem to be developing any future.

Had progress actually stopped on Orll, now that the contact humanoids were no longer pushing and pulling at the culture under the ship's direction, or had Orll veered off in a totally new direction, a direction that could not be understood and was therefore potentially deadly to Earth?

Steve Harcourt didn't know, yet. He dug in and observed the observers.

Greenson, the physicist, was somewhat bored. He had managed to assume a virtually horizontal posture on his chair and was earnestly engaged in sketching a scholarly doodle which involved an almost infinite series of infinity symbols. On his private notebook, Steve Harcourt wrote: Nothing doing in physics.

Berkonowitz, the chemist, was staring at his screen and shaking his head from side to side. He drummed his fingers on his knee. Harcourt noted: A chemist is repeating a re-

search line already known to be a blind alley.

Verissimo, the psychologist, was stroking his beard in considerable satisfaction. He was leaning forward, smiling at the screen, and jotting down references on his pad. Harcourt wrote: Verissimo has spotted a cure in progress; the Orll psychologists continue to get good results.

Sykes-Fitzgerald, the sociologist, was leaning back in his chair, following the action on the screen with loyal but hardly fascinated eyes. He was filling in a graph and compiling a table of statistics. Harcourt guessed: The rural trend goes on as predicted. And so it went, down the line. When he had finished, Steve had an excellent preview of the next conference report. As had been independently discovered long ago in a supposedly unrelated discipline, the odds were somewhat in favor of the player who had stacked the deck.

He left the sound off—it took a trained linguist to make any sense out of everyday speech, even after it had been slowed down by a calibrated repeater—and switched his viewer on.

Orll came into the room. He was looking down into a city. He adjusted the viewer and he was in a suburban street. He leaned forward. Unlike many of the others, for whom the novelty had understandably worn off, he had never quite gotten used to Orll.

If you want to look at a man whose life-span is two weeks, who lives on a synthetic world on which all life processes are speeded up accordingly, you have to look at him on film. The film can be projected at an adjusted speed, thus bringing a measure of order out of chaos.

Every day, you could watch a man in the city, living out his life, dreaming his scattered dreams. On film, he would look normal enough. Oh, not really human, of course, but you got used to that in a hurry. He was a man, a different sort of a man, but still a man. Almost, you would think you could leave your ship, pacing his tiny planet in its voyage around the sun, go down to his city, buy him a beer, get to know him better.

But when you looked tomorrow, he would be years old.

If you looked in a week, he would be dead.

Down there on that little world, caught and held for an hour or a minute or a second on the viewer screens, were people. Men who might have been your friends, and women you might have loved. Children you could watch, and pull for. New kinds of minds you wanted to engage, not drain.

Engineers, poets, sailors, athletes, burlesque queens, social workers, professors, bums, crooks, doctors, clerks—All dead and forgotten in a month. A complete new set every two weeks.

Steve loaded up his pipe and

watched the screens. He saw a politician trying to capture the new rural vote without antagonizing the urban population. He saw a young designer drawing in an extra fin for next year's copter model. He saw two kids slugging it out over a disputed marble.

He watched an artist for a long time.

These people, he knew, had their faults. They were people, after all. But they were not monsters. He smiled. It would take a lively imagination indeed to cast him in the role of a Frankenstein.

Still—The controlled experiment was uncontrolled now.

When you walked out of the lab and left ingredients bubbling away in a tube clamped over a Bunsen burner, things happened. It was too early to be sure. And when you're fooling with people, any kind of people, you've got to be sure.

Before Steve went to bed, he took the contact humanoid off the floor and put him in cold storage. It would be tough for the little guy to have to live out his life on ship time.

That would be a hard thing to forget . . .

It is icy in here.

This is what it is like to be dead.

You can only lie on the floor in the darkness, not moving, and think the long, long thoughts of forever.

But something is about to happen

on Orll. Something *big*. I know it. It's *got* to happen, don't you see?

My world is mined to its core with fissionable materials. It can be disintegrated electronically at the touch of a button. Just in case.

Just in case the Men get too worried about what is going on down there. Just in case even Steve isn't willing to let the experiment go on any longer.

And then what will happen to my people?

What will become of me?

And there's more than that. Those people are *my* people. I've worked with them for fifty thousand years. I introduced the wheel and the zero and the steam engine. Sure, they weren't really mine. I hadn't thought them up. I'm not a Man. But they had needed me at important times, and Orll had come far along the road to civilization. That made me glad, with a strange, sad happiness.

My people, don't you see? If their way of life is dead and still unless it is hauled and pushed by the Man, then what am I?

I could tell myself that I'm different, of course. The contact humanoids had to be different. We had to understand the history and purpose of Orll, so that we could be sent down there where the Men could never go to carry out instructions.

I had to be very much like a Man, but not *too* much.

I had to be absolutely reliable.

I had to be conditioned, like the others.

I had to be an in-between thing, an incomplete thing, an *almost* thing.

It isn't easy.

I lie on the floor in the cold darkness and wait. As I lie here and the slow years drift by, I go back over my first tapes, trying to understand.

Remember?

*When had it all started? That was probably a meaningless question.*

*Still, give it a date: 2005. In 2005, Man had left his native planet. Localized gravity fields and the perfection of atomic fuels made space travel within the solar system a practical undertaking. Unhappily, there was no life in the solar system, apart from certain lichen-like growths on Mars. Worse still, the worlds of the solar system turned out to be on the useless side, for the quite fundamental reason that Man couldn't live on them.*

*Man was what he was. If he couldn't find the New World in his backyard, he would simply have to take his cue from Columbus and set sail across the ocean. The question was never why but how.*

*There was only one sure thing about the stars: they were going to present challenges that would make nuclear fission look like a crossword puzzle. Man had skidded across some*



thin atomic ice in his time, but he was still an unknown quantity to himself.

The first step on the road to the stars had to be Man's understanding of himself.

The social sciences, with all their faults and limitations, were a necessary starting point. The one basic reason for the slow progress made by the social sciences was easily stated: you cannot perform controlled experiments on Men. You have to guess and juggle and approximate, and that isn't good enough. You may get where you're going eventually, but you're travelling by dogcart.

Item: The physical sciences, together with newer specialized sciences involving cybernetics, electroencephalography, and symbolic logic, were moving very fast. They had the know-how.

Item: If social science had at its disposal machines that responded like Men, then controlled experimentation would be possible. By pooling their resources, the sciences could produce such machines.

Certain things were necessary:

They had to have language, and the ability to symbolize.

They had to be capable of cultural transference.

They had to reproduce themselves sexually, in order to produce families and all the ramifications of kinship.

They had to have the illusion, at least, of free will.

They had to breed in a hurry, so that experiments could be quick enough to be useful.

Finally, the experiment had to be isolated and safe. By 2010, the humanoids were ready. They were simplified approximations of Men, basically mechanical, incapable of producing nuclear fission, space travel, or mutations. A tiny artificial planet was built as a laboratory. It was a close copy of the Earth as the Earth had been fifty thousand years ago.

It was not a perfect experiment, because the humanoids were not true Men. But it was better than rats and monkeys, and enough could be learned so that the scientists could extrapolate to Man himself, because the humanoids differed in clear, exact, and sharply defined ways.

In science, even the crucial experiments only lead to more experiments. So long as there is science, there are no final answers.

In 2010, the humanoids were turned on.

The scientists applied the stimuli, predicted the results, and qualified what happened. They used the known history and prehistory of Earth as a check sample. They learned, even from what Orll could not be made to do, because it told them how Man was different.

After Orll had drawn abreast of the Earth, the scientists withdrew their contact humanoids and waited. The data on the 'future' of Orll

*would be incredibly significant. It would not give the Men a glimpse of Earth's future, but it would tell them a lot about the future of a planet with a roughly similar background and precisely calculated limiting differences. Whatever it might be, the future of Orll would not be the future of Earth, but it would provide insights into how the future of Earth would be different.*

*Scientifically, they could not afford to end the experiment until they knew.*

*They waited.*

*The future of Orll was long in coming.*

*They waited as long as they dared.*

*Until, suddenly—*

They used me again in twelve hundred years. In terms of ship time, that is less than a year. In terms of cold storage time, it is an eternity.

From the first, there was no doubt that this was *it*.

Even before I was speeded up and conditioned for the trip back to Orll, I thrilled to the contagious excitement in the air. It bubbled through the Great Ship like an electric river, charging everything it touched.

I was nervous, of course. No one had to tell me that something was happening on Orll. I knew it in every fiber of my being. I knew it and I was glad, glad no matter what it might turn out to be, glad just that Orll had *done something*.

My people were not dead.

The computer report they showed me confirmed what I already knew, and made it more specific. It read: **THERE HAS BEEN PERCEPTIBLE CHANGE ON ORLL IN THE PAST TWELVE HOURS IN THE FORM OF NEW SPHERICAL STRUCTURES OF UNDETERMINED SIGNIFICANCE.**

The language was cold, cold as ice. After all, computers have no hearts. They can't laugh and rejoice when the blood goes pounding through their veins. They can't dream. Maybe that's what makes them different from Men, and even from almost-Men.

But the words were magic to me.

How can I tell you what they meant?

Steve took me down to the Peeping Tom and showed me one of the 'new spherical structures' in the Viewer. How precise is the language of computers—and how it misses the point! The white, gently curving hive gleamed like snow in the sunlight. It nestled in a green park, and it was comfortable, like a growing thing. It was warm. I liked it once, although I could not have told you why.

Perhaps it was because these, at last, were truly *ours*.

What were they? No viewers were inside the snowy spheres, and therefore the Men could not see into them. They were worried. Men are always worried. Lots of things can happen inside of any building. And

when the building happens to be in the future, or at any rate in *a* future, and you don't know what it was built for, you've got good reasons for being afraid.

I confess, though, that I wasn't afraid. I was only happy and excited. Almost, I thought I could guess.

Well, I didn't have to guess. My job was to go down there and find out what they were. I tried to suspend judgment until I knew.

My conditioning for the trip was unusually thorough. There was a long session with the linguists, so that I could speak one of the current languages of Orll. Twelve hundred years can make a lot of difference in a language. If anything, they intensified my inhibitors against interfering with whatever I found. I was never a free agent on Orll, naturally. I suppose I have never been a free agent anywhere. I just did what I was sent out to do, and came back.

That doesn't tell you anything about what I may have *thought*.

After too long a time, I was ready.

My patience was wearing thin.

I left the Great Ship, filled with a greater excitement than I had ever known.

The contact ship carried me through the space that could never be mine, and I was landed again in a field of grass, by night. I was kissed by the wind and the stars.

The ship left me, sneaking back

to its mother. I was alone with the night flowers and the wonderful, wonderful air. You may imagine that air is a trivial thing, a nothing thing.

But you have never been dead.

I was *alive* again. I wanted to run through the velvet night and climb a hill and stand among the pines with the sweet wind in my face. I wanted to live *my* life.

But this time it was more than a built-in directive that urged me on. I thrilled to the challenge before me.

I wanted to find one of those spheres!

I found a ghostly road and followed it through a small, sleeping village. The village was muffled by darkness, and only one dog barked lazily at me as I passed.

When I reached the nearest sphere, it was dawn.

I stood and stared. It took my breath away. Look at it.

Sunrise on a bubble of snow. Low clouds mottled in pink and black. Around its gleaming whiteness, trees of green flushed with warm yellows and golds. It swelled high over my head, melting into the sky.

I loved it. I was human enough for that. I went inside.

It was simple. The door slid open at my touch. There were no guards, no attendants, no ticket-takers. There was only a soft, hushed hallway, and then a cool circular room, fresh and clean as pebbles in the silver depths of a spring.

I sat down in a chair and closed my eyes.

The music started.

Can't you hear it, if you try?

It was like all the music of all the worlds, and yet it was achingly, wondrously new. It lifted me buoyantly, utterly outside myself. It whispered and sighed to me, gently, reverently.

It was my music.

Softly, softly, remember the quiet nights and the stars? Feel the flowers and the winds? Remember the friends you have been happy with, the friends who are gone, the friends of long, long ago? Touch the warm air of summer and the sun-splashed waters of lakes of memories?

Gently, gently, remember the slow coldness of the long, long waits, and taste the small, cozy thoughts that you had for your own? See again the children in the turning leaves of autumn? Know again, forever, the perfumes of women you did not dare to love.

It was tenderness and loveliness. It was contentment and fulfillment.

It was peace.

The music did not end, and never would end, but it diminished and faded. Resting. I opened my eyes and saw that I was no longer alone in the sphere. There was a woman sitting a few rows back, a middle-aged, gray-haired woman I had never seen before. She smiled and I smiled, and thus quickly we were friends. I stayed all day, unable to

leave, and when I finally tore myself away the night sky was already paling with the light of false dawn.

I was happy, and more than that. I was proud.

My people were not dead.

Two years later, I was back at the pickup ship, and it carried me up to the Great Ship where the Men were waiting. More than ever, I hated to be slowed down, but they had to adjust me back to ship time.

I told them what I had found out. I told them about the music and the bubbles of snow, and the warmth of Orll. I guess I was a little corny, but I tried to get it across to them. I tried hard.

I got nowhere fast. They could not understand what I said. It was not easy for me to talk to them, because I am not a Man. They were not suspicious of what I told them, but they didn't trust my judgment. Except for Steve. I think he knew.

They took out my tapes then and played our music. They listened, and then they all knew. Music saved our world, and more than that. It saved our self-respect.

The change in the Great Ship was astonishing. The tension drained away as though it had never been, and the Men relaxed. They had looked into the future of Orll, and they had learned, and there was no danger there.

Before I had to die again, I heard them talking. Old Steve saw to that.

Steve himself did a lot of the talking, and I recorded some of his words on my tapes.

Here are a few of them:

"We didn't understand what happened when we left Orll alone. We were scared that Orll might turn into a threat to Earth. We were guilty of anthropomorphic thinking, squared, compounded, and raised to the *n*th power. We peered into our little viewers and asked, 'what are those tricky devils up to now?' Then we saw the spheres and we really got worried.

"Well, the tricky devils went right ahead with their sinister plans. All the time we were moaning and groaning and sharpening up the old atomic kick in the pants, they were writing symphonies, painting pictures, building lovely temples and shrines. That's it, boys and girls. We kept yammering about whether Orll had come to a screeching halt or had veered off in a new direction. They've done *both*.

"They've stopped progressing as we define progress because they are incapable of going any further. At the same time, they've turned inward. The three safeguards that were built into Orll at the beginning were limiting factors. Orll can't destroy herself and Orll can't go to the stars. Orll isn't Earth. The people there have reached an equilibrium. They have filled out the framework. They're not a threat to Earth, and never can be.

"We've got our data now, as much as we can get from Orll. We'll have to go to Man himself for the rest of our answers. The controlled experiment is over, ladies and gentlemen. The great experiment, the *uncontrolled* experiment, is just beginning. It will work itself out on stars and in ages that none of us will ever live to see.

"As for Orll, there is only one thing left to do."

Those were Steve's words. I've thought of them often as I lie here in the cold for the last time.

I've thought of many things.

A thousand years later when I came out, they had the force screen equipment set up around Orll, ready to be turned on. We were to be the last ones through, the other contact people and myself. It's strange that we hardly know each other, after fifty thousand years. But we were only together in death, and on Orll we were widely separated.

We have no names.

I watched Old Steve as I waited to leave the Great Ship. I knew him so well. He sat at the Peeping Tom, just before it was turned off forever. I could almost follow his thoughts, and just at the end he spoke to me:

*Steve Harcourt looked through the viewers at the clean white domes glistening in clear winter air, and watched the people he had come to know.*

*He thought, Much of humanity's*

good is in them. Maybe this is what we should have been, all peace and laughter and happiness, always and forever.

*Almost, he envied them.*

*But for men it could never be, and never could have been.*

*The screen went blank, for good. Very soon now, the force shield would be turned on, protecting Orll for as long as there was need. That was the least that the men could do.*

*Steve thought about the strange stellar tropism that had pulled his people out of the seas and outward toward the stars.*

*The great spaceship shuddered with power, ready to accelerate. It throbbed with eagerness. In his mind's eye, Steve could see the ship, his ship, hurtling through space, back to the Earth it had left over forty years ago.*

*And he could see other ships, and other men. Blazing up from Earth and flashing at speeds past comprehension out into the greatest sea of all, the sea with a billion shores.*

*Man, on the voyage he would one day have to take.*

*He looked at his old hands and smiled. The vision faded. It was not for him.*

*The spaceship sang with power.*

*Steve went up to the small humanoid with whom he had shared so many wonderful, exciting years. He thought: My life is over, and now his is about to start.*

*"Good luck, friend," he said.*

*The shuttle ship left, and he was alone.*

It is thirty years later, and now I am old as Steve was old. It is hard to believe that only a little over a week has passed, ship time.

But the Great Ship is gone, for keeps.

Maybe I should hate them for using us as they did. I don't know. But hate isn't in me, I'm afraid. I only hope that the Men found out enough from us to make their road a little easier. They have so far to go, and even Men are people.

It is fine to be able to live, and even to die the last, true death. The wind still whispers sweetly across the grassy fields, and the flowers and trees surround my home. I have a wife now, and two sons. One of my sons is called Steve.

We have our music, and life has been good to me.

Mostly, I am very happy here. But twice now I have seen their ships, far above me in the night sky. I have looked up, and known what they were and where they were going.

I am only a little different from my people, and the excitement does not come over me often. It will die with me.

Mostly, I am very happy here.

But twice now I have seen their ships.

And sometimes, just sometimes—

*Oh God, God! How I would love to have gone with Them! • • •*

HE WAS THE CHOSEN ONE, THE LAST MAN. HE WAS . . .

# NOAH

*by Charles Beckman, Jr.*

**T**HE RAIN started early in the year of 1968. Perhaps the only man in the world who was not concerned about it was Hal Tribble. He was in Death Row, waiting to be electrocuted for murder.

In New York, all flights had been canceled. Trucking was at a standstill. There wasn't a road in the United States without dangerous washouts.

A few trains were still moving, but slowly. Ships were carrying the bulk of the freight but the colossal storms at sea were making it hazardous.

In his cell, Hal Tribble listened

to his radio and smoked endless cigarettes. He was going to be electrocuted in six hours.

The radio announcer's voice was barely audible through the constant crackle of static.

" . . . wires of Associated Press . . . Paris . . . being evacuated. Large portions of the city now under water . . . In England, the Thames has spread across most of London . . . in general to a depth of five feet. People are moving about in skiffs and motor boats . . . persons who have moved to second stories are being evacuated, Moscow says . . .

The static finally drowned the an-

nouncer's voice completely. Hal Tribble finished his cigarette and lit another. He took down a leather-bound Bible and tried to concentrate on words. A sticky coat of sweat covered his pinched, weasel face. His damp hands trembled.

He was afraid to die.

For two months, he had been sitting here, waiting to die and becoming more frightened about it all the time. Finally, yesterday, the lawyer that Marvin Liddell had hired for him came into the cell block about supper time. His sad, defeated face told Hal the outcome of his final plea to the governor.

The lawyer sat on the edge of Hal's bunk and had a cigarette with him. He raised tired eyes to the small patch of barred window and stared blankly at the thick gray skies out of which fell the constant sheets of water.

"If it's any consolation," the lawyer said, in a weary voice, "you're not by yourself. We're all going if this nightmare continues."

"Yeah?" Tribble croaked, shakily lighting a cigarette. A nervous tick in his left cheek jumped spasmodically. "Well, that's a hell of a lot of consolation." He clenched his fists and tried to keep from shaking himself to pieces. "At least you don't know *when*. You can't point to a certain place on a clock and say, 'after that I'll stop being alive.'" His voice climbed up the scale and became ragged. "That *knowing*. That's

the part that is driving me nuts."

Nieman arose and shrugged into his slicker. "Well," he muttered, "there isn't anything else I can do."

What he meant was, he had his own troubles. He had a family, somewhere out in that dripping black world, waiting for him to come home.

He walked out of the cell without looking back or saying good-bye.

Now Hal was sucking his cigarette down to a hot, glowing coal and waiting for the guards to come take him to the little room at the end of the hall.

He tried to concentrate on the Bible he was reading. For weeks now, he had been reading every religious book they would bring him from the prison library. It was a matter of clutching at a final straw, because before he came here he'd been anything but a religious man.

He had some misgivings about how God felt towards him, for his life had not exactly been exemplary. He had grown up in a pool room and his first full time occupation had been picking pockets and selling marijuana cigarettes.

The minutes ticked slowly by. The rain came down in great, majestic sheets.

Then they came for Hal Tribble.

He drew back from them, his face pale green, whimpering and shivering, looking for all the world like a frightened rodent. But they did the things that had to be done at a



time like this: shaving his head, slitting his trouser legs.

Then the warden said, "Come on, Hal. It's time."

The little man stared at them out of bulging frog eyes, spittle running down his chin. They had to support him. He stumbled down the hall between two husky guards. Behind him, the chaplain read words in a tired, dead voice. These days, everyone's voice had that tired, dead sound.

Hal Tribble recoiled as the door opened and he saw the chair. The ugly throwback of medieval torture chambers. The clumsy arms and legs and the frightening electrodes.

"Come on, Hal," the warden said gently. "Don't make us drag you in there."

Somehow, he made the last few feet. Once he was in the chair, they worked fast, holding him down, clamping the straps around his arms and legs. Then the hood settled over his head.

The warden stepped back and nodded at the electrician behind the switchboard.

The man reached for his controls.

At that moment, there was a tremendous flash of lightning and a crash of thunder that broke windows with its vibrations and flung some of the men to the floor. The room became pitch dark. Outside, the heavy sheets of water slashed at the stone walls and poured through broken windows.

The warden picked himself up from his knees, cursing. "Lights!" he shouted. "Dammit, bring a flashlight!"

From somewhere, the bright beam of a flashlight moved toward him.

Hal sat under the stifling hood, sweating and quaking. A hand touched his.

"Have to wait a minute, Hal. The current went off. It won't be long."

The minutes ticked by.

"Good Lord," somebody whispered.

The rain slashed and the thunder muttered.

A man's voice in the room broke. "Take him down, Warden! That's torture."

The warden wiped his face with a handkerchief. He nodded. "Yeah." He gave an order to the guards to unstrap Hal Tribble and return him to his cell until the electric break was repaired.

Back in his cell, Hal cowered in a corner of his bunk and sweated. It was the same as before, except now everything was pitch black. Pinpoints of light from candles and flashlights moved around the concrete corridors.

The patch of window was too black to distinguish it from the black wall around it.

The thunder rumbled and the rain sighed.

Somewhere, down the cell block in Death Row, a rich Negro voice

sang softly, "Look down . . . look down . . . that lonesome road—"

The heavy steel and concrete building suddenly quivered as if shaken by an earthquake tremor. The prisoners began setting up a clamor, rattling their doors and yelling.

The guards ran up and down the corridors with their flashlights and guns, warning the prisoners to be quiet. But the tremors continued, growing worse. There was a deep rumbling and the whine of straining steel and the crash of broken concrete.

Guards brought out megaphones and shouted instructions to the prisoners: "A heavy flood has weakened the foundations of the prison buildings. Everybody is going to be evacuated in motor boats. The guards are carrying machine guns and have orders to shoot to kill at the first sign of disorder or a break. Your doors are being opened. Now file slowly down to the outer gate."

The darting flash beams spotted the men in formless gray clothes shuffling out of the cells. A special guard came into Hal Tribble's cell and thrust a .45 against his ribs.

"Just one quick move, Tribble. That's all I ask for."

Hal got up and walked to the open door. He moved in a daze, unable to fully comprehend that he was still alive.

From a lower floor, there came the sound of trouble. Men shouted, then

there was a brief, staccato burst of a machine gun. A man screamed. The machine gun rattled again and the scream cut off abruptly.

Hal's guard laughed harshly. "Shoot to kill, the warden said."

An eternity of shuffling around in dark, wet halls as the buildings shook and crumpled around them, then they were outside, falling into boats.

Hal looked over the side. The water was gray and thick like slime, filled with driftwood. It swirled around the boats, tossing them like chips.

The motor coughed once, then roared. They swept out, into the black denseness of the night, into the sheets of water. It was like diving into Niagara Falls.

In a second they were out of sight of the other boats, all other life. Hal was soaked to the skin. Shivering, he looked around the boat. He was in the prow with a handful of prisoners. In the rear were two guards, one of them steering the boat, the other holding a machine gun on them.

The two guards were arguing. "Go on," the one operating the motor cursed. "It's them or us, now. How long do you think we'd last if they get their hands on that chopper?"

"I—I can't."

"Hell, give me that thing!" The guard who had been crouched over the engine leaped up and snatched

the machine gun. He swung it at the huddled prisoners and flame licked around its snout. Men screamed and rolled over into the swirling water.

The first burst missed Hal. Blood splattered all over him and wounded men writhed against him. He was stunned by the brutality of the act. But as the guard swung the gun back and it resumed its stutter of death, Hal shook himself into action. He threw himself overboard and the black waters curled over his head.

It was morning. Hal knew it was morning by the gray tinge of clouds overhead. He could still not see five feet in front of him, but there was a difference from the utter blackness of a few hours ago.

He lay in the slimy mud of a riverbank, resting. For hours, it seemed, he had swum underwater after leaping from the boat. Then he'd fought his way to the surface and the current had swept him along. Driftwood had slammed and bruised him. Then he'd grabbed a thick log and held onto it. When it got lighter, he saw that a snake was clinging to a branch, inches from his face. But the snake ignored him and after a while he paid no attention to it. Finally, the log bumped into solid earth and he waded ashore to rest.

There was no use trying to get dry in this world of mud and everlasting rain. He realized that he was thirsty

so he simply rolled over onto his back and opened his mouth. The falling rain had a peculiar sweet, sticky flavor.

After a while he thought that he was going to have to find some shelter. A few more hours of this exposure and he'd be dead with pneumonia.

For hours he sloughed through a dripping forest. The slimy mud was bottomless. Sometimes he actually swam in the mud. Finally, he saw lights up ahead.

On the edge of the forest, he came on a dead man floating face down in a pool of water. Tribble forced his reluctant fingers to strip the soggy clothes off the bloated corpse and put them on himself in place of his gray prisoner uniform with the da-glo lettering across the back.

Then he stumbled on toward the lights. It was a small village. Houses huddled on a rise in the ground like wet, bedraggled chickens.

Hal pounded on one of the doors. Inside, there was warmth and candle light. Presently, the door opened and a young woman stared out at him with a blank, vacant face.

"Can I come in for a while to get dry?" Hal asked. "I'm lost."

The woman looked at him as if not comprehending. Then she shrugged and stepped back and he walked into the room.

The candlelight flickered over the bare room. Most of the furniture was

gone. They had been breaking it up and feeding it into a wood stove to keep warm. A gray-haired man was sitting in a rocking chair on the other side of the room, with his head bent over the dials of a radio, fiddling with them. He paid no attention to Hal or the woman.

She looked at the old man and shook her head sadly. "The current went off a week ago, but he keeps sitting there, trying to get the news. He won't believe me when I tell him it's no use."

The rain drummed on the shingle roof over them. Occasional flashes of lightning broke the dark gray mantle that hung over the earth.

"Could I borrow some dry clothes?" Hal asked through chattering teeth.

"Of course," the young woman said. She pointed to an adjoining room. "Take some of *his* clothes. He won't be needing them any more."

Hal went into the room, closing the door behind him. He struggled out of his dripping clothes. In a closet, he found a towel and he rubbed his shivering body until his skin glowed pink. Then he put on some dry socks and shoes, a pair of gray trousers, a shirt and a thick sweater.

He was beginning to feel like his old self again. He sat down and surveyed his situation. All in all, he was a very fortunate fellow. With the help of nature, he'd done the im-

possible, broken out of Death Row. Now if he could get to New York, Marvin Liddell would give him some money and he could get clear out of the country.

Hal sat there chuckling and hugging himself with pleasure. People were becoming panicky over the prolonged rains. Why they were a blessing! The rain was the most wonderful thing that had ever happened. With the country in a turmoil over the floods, nobody would spend any time looking for escaped convicts.

Hal did a little dance around the room. He went to a window and flung a kiss at the rain. "Bless you," he said to the clouds. "Go on and pour to your heart's content!"

Then with his old practiced skill in such matters, he went quickly through the drawers in the bureau. Under a pile of shirts, he found a billfold. In the billfold there was over a hundred dollars in crisp, lovely United States money.

He crammed the bills into a pocket, took a slicker out of the closet and donned it. Then he went into the other room where the young woman and the old man sat.

"I'm going to borrow these clothes for a little while," Hal said to the woman and made up some kind of story about a stalled car down the road.

She seemed to pay little attention to his words. She merely shrugged and went back to staring dully out

of the window at the thick eternity of grayness that covered the world.

Oh, the fools, Hal thought, walking out of the house. To be afraid of this blessed, cheerful rain. All sorts of marvelous opportunities were occurring to him. It was so easy to walk into houses and stores and help yourself to whatever you wanted. The people were too busy being miserable about a little rain to even care!

Hurray for the rain, thought Hal Tribble. As far as he was concerned it could rain forever.

He walked along between the houses, feeling his way through the darkness. Then he came to a garage. He wiped the window and cupped his hand around his face so he could peer in. By straining his eyes, he made out the sleek lines of a late model Stutz-Craimer automobile.

The garage doors were not locked. Again his luck was holding! He went in and examined the car. Ah, wonderful—it was one of the new Diesel jobs. That simplified the fuel problem.

He crawled into the plush interior of the automobile. Naturally the keys were in it. What else, for a man with his phenomenal streak of luck?

He hummed a gay little tune as he turned keys and pressed buttons on the gleaming magnilite dash. The starting mechanism whirled softly. Soon the powerful Diesel was purring like a kitten. He backed out of the garage.

One of the buttons automatically locked mud chains in place around the perma-rubber tires. With the chains in place, the powerful four-wheel drive carried the machine across a sea of mud to the highway. There, he stopped long enough to flip on the map televue screen. He spun a dial until he came to upper New York State, where he was now located.

His car was located on the televue screen by an illuminated dot. The highways leading to New York City were all outlined in glowing green lines. He studied them carefully, noting bright red symbols that indicated wash-outs and questionable bridges. Even while he looked other lights were flashing on and symbols were constantly changing as the map televue broadcasting company of New York City was amending map reports as fast as they came in from highway patrols.

It was not an encouraging picture. There wasn't a safe road left. He'd have to drive slowly and take his chances.

He checked his fuel supply, found it low. On the way out of town, he stopped at a grocery store, and with the hundred dollars he'd swiped, he bought ten pounds of butter, the nearest thing to Diesel fuel he could find. He stuffed the butter in the tank and watched it dissolve as the automatic fuel heating device warmed the tank.

Well, it was enough to take him

to New York. He also bought some sardines and crackers to munch and a bottle of beer to wash them down. Then he started on the long, slow trip to New York City. He could not drive over fifteen miles an hour on the best stretches. With his arc-beam headlights turned to their maximum power, they ended in a solid wall of water five feet in front of his automobile.

Two weary days later, he drove the mud-splattered vehicle into New York City.

So far, New York had weathered the rains better than any other large city in the world. Turbo storm sewers installed as a possible war measure in recent years had been able to keep up with the rising water. But now even the giant sewers were being overpowered and Hal drove through knee-deep water down Broadway.

The streets and sidewalks, for the most part, were deserted. Most of the population had, weeks ago, fled for the higher lands of the Appalachians. Those who remained stayed in the higher stories of buildings. So far, they had been able to maintain electric power, and some neon signs left on as beacons, shone warmly through the solid wall of falling water.

Hal Tribble felt a great relief when the solid canyons of buildings closed protectively around him. He had the native New Yorker's instinc-

tive sense of security in the big city. The rest of the world might go pot, but it was utterly absurd to think that anything in the universe would upset the equilibrium of the world's greatest city.

He drove directly to the apartment building where Marvin Liddell lived. He did not for one instant doubt that Mr. Liddell would advance him all the money he needed and arrange passage on a ship that would carry him to the safety of a foreign port. Marvin Liddell was, in the year 1968, the most powerful man in New York City. Since the return of prohibition in 1964, he controlled all bootlegging and rum-running. Through the years of steadily increasing crime, since 1960, he had been the undisputed czar of the crime syndicate that operated in New York.

Hal had worked for Marvin Liddell for a number of years and it was directly through his service to Liddell that he was in his present mess. Liddell had spent thousands, trying to get Hal off, but it had been one of those cases of the political bigwigs pouncing on an unimportant little man and playing his case up big to satisfy the voters who were demanding action.

*Key Man in Liddell Ring Arrested*, the newspapers had said about Hal Tribble. Which was a lot of baloney, since the most important work Hal had done in the organization before this murder was to run

down to the corner for sandwiches and cigarettes for the boss.

Anyway, Marvin Liddell was loyal to the men in his organization, even to a little errand boy like Hal Tribble. He wouldn't let Hal down now.

Tribble parked the car and went into the expensive apartment building, which was mostly glass and chrome. Hal knew he didn't have any time to waste. He must leave the country now, while things were in a turmoil and the police had other things on their minds. As soon as the rains stopped, and they were bound to, any day now, the police would begin checking up. And when they did, he'd be about as safe as a celluloid mouse sitting on an H-bomb.

Hal hurried up the carpeted stairway to the second floor. The expensive building was leaking. He sloshed through puddles of water in the hall.

Except for the fact that he owned the building, Marvin Liddell would be paying a thousand dollars a month for his apartment on the second floor.

Nobody answered the door buzzer.

Hal frowned and his palms grew sweaty. He hoped Mr. Liddell hadn't left town.

Hal tried the door. It was not locked. He walked into the living room. A five-foot wide television screen was glowing. Hal glanced at

it and saw an announcer come into a room and sit behind a desk. The announcer's face looked like the mask of a week-old corpse. The man's voice came out of the television set in a toneless rasp.

"... the last communication from England. That has ended all contact with Europe and Asia. We have every reason to believe that the entire British Isles is now under the surface of the sea..." The man's voice broke. He raised a trembling hand and passed it across his eyes. Then he took up the script again. "A communique from Washington informs us that a rocket ship is being loaded with state documents. At midnight tonight, the President of the United States and his cabinet will board the rocket. They will be flown directly to the U. S. Satellite."

Hal impatiently snapped the television set off.

Rain, rain, rain. That's all the people could think about. Well, he had something more important to contend with.

From the living room, Hal wandered through a vast leisure-den with a swimming pool and indoor garden. Sunlamps made the room bright and hot. He opened a door to Liddell's study, where the important man sometimes worked. Then he froze with his hand glued to the door knob.

Marvin Liddell was in there, at his desk. But he wouldn't be loaning Hal Tribble money or booking

passage to South America for him. Marvin Liddell was dead. A revolver in his pudgy right hand had blown his brains out all over his expensive wall paper.

Hal closed the door gently, feeling quite sick.

A shadow passed across one huge solar window of the leisure-den.

Hal ran across the room, pressed his face against the den. It was a copter. No doubt about it. And he'd seen the word *Police* on its side in super-da-glo, burning through the dense rain.

Tribble's heart set up a steady, frightened patter. A dry, clamping sensation came to his throat. The police must be coming to investigate a report that a pistol shot had been heard in this apartment. In another minute they would be bursting in here. It was no place for an escaped murderer to be found!

Hal broke out of the apartment and ran upstairs as fast as his legs would carry him. On the fourth floor, he tried door after door until he found one that opened at his touch and he scooted into the room.

This apartment was dark, silent. He flipped light switches, hurried from room to room, orienting himself with the place. In the bedroom, he yanked closets open, saw only a man's wardrobe. All the suits were the same size, so the apartment must be occupied by a single man.

On the dressing table, he found papers and a billfold. He yanked

identification cards out of the billfold. Driver's license, social security and the Loyalty Pledge Registration Card that every citizen had been required to carry since 1959.

NOAH J. DIETRICH, Ph.D., D. S.

The name struck a responsive chord in the back of Tribble's mind. Dr. Dietrich. Some kind of scientist. Wasn't he the guy who figured out how to build the *U. S. Satellite*—that screwball artificial moon they stuck up in the sky at a big cost to the taxpayers?

Yeah, Hal was pretty sure he was the guy. He recalled that Marvin Liddell once passed a remark about the famous scientist living in the apartment building.

Hal found a picture in one of the compartments of the billfold. Well, he and Dietrich looked something alike. They were both small and rat-faced. Dietrich was nearly bald. Well, that was a good joke. Hal's hair had been shaved off in Death Row a couple of days ago.

"Hello, Doc," Hal said to his reflection in the mirror.

Then there was the frantic drum of knuckles on the door of the apartment.

Quaking in his shoes, Hal walked into the living room. Reluctantly, he opened the door a crack.

Standing in the hall outside his door was neither the police nor Professor Dietrich. It was a tall blonde with a trench coat wrapped tightly around what was undoubtedly the



most perfect figure Hal had ever laid eyes on. As an afterthought, he managed to elevate his gaze as far as her face and saw that it too was beautiful.

The girl fastened a pair of wide, scared blue eyes on the name plate above the door buzzer, then the eyes scurried over and hit him with their full voltage. "D-Doctor D-Dietricht," she said through rattling teeth, "you've got to let me come in."

"It'll be a pleasure," Hal exclaimed and opened the door wider.

She shot in like a homing pigeon. While Hal was getting the door locked, she made a circuit of the windows, squinting out. Then she plopped on a sofa with her hands thrust in the deep pockets of her trench coat. The coat parted at her knee which was smooth and quite bare.

Hal toyed with the naughty thought that she was bare like that all over under the coat and the thought rewarded him with a delicious tingling sensation from head to foot.

A lock of blonde hair had tumbled over one blue eye. She blew at it out of a corner of her mouth. "Got a cigarette, Doc?"

He produced one and lit it for her. "You may call me Noah," he said cozily.

Again knuckles rapped at the door. This time with solemn official thuds.

"Ohmigod," the girl gasped and her cigarette tumbled down the front of her trench coat in a shower of sparks. She got up and her hands leaped out of her coat pockets and fastened themselves on Hal's sweater.

"L-listen, Doc," she panted, "that's the police. I saw their cop-ter land on the roof a minute ago. L-look, I'm in a jam, kinda. T-tell 'em I'm your wife. Will yuh? P-please?" Her teeth were going like castinets.

Hal unglued her fingers from his sweater. "Sure," he said, occupied with his own problems.

He opened the door and gazed upon two of the biggest cops he'd ever seen in his life. They were each at least seven feet tall and would have to turn sideways to get their shoulders through the door. New York must have bought their police force new uniforms since Hal left, for he had never seen cops dressed like this before. They were in dark-blue single-piece garments that covered every inch of their bodies except their hands and faces.

Hal decided to carry the ball. "Look here," he snapped impatiently, sounding as much like a college professor as he could, "I'm Doctor Dietricht!" He whipped out his bill-fold and shoved his identification under their noses. "Now, what's the idea of disturbing me?"

One of the men (they both looked exactly alike) nodded his head sol-

emly. "Thank you, Doctor. We were told to check your identification so that no error was made. You must come with us."

Hal gawped at him.

The other policeman glanced into the room. "Who is the woman?" he asked in a deep, resonant voice.

"My wife," Hal responded automatically. "Listen, why—"

"She must come, too."

One of them got the girl. The other took Hal's arm politely but firmly and escorted them up to the roof.

It was a peculiar helicopter. Hal had never before seen one without blades. However with the rain coming down in such a solid wall, you couldn't tell much about it. Only the word *Police* stood out, burning through the rain with an intensity Hal had never seen before. They must have found something stronger than super-da-glo, since he'd been in prison.

They were plopped into bucket seats in the cabin and strapped down. The machine darted into the air, leaving Hal's stomach somewhere thousands of feet below. The ride took over an hour. Then they came to rest. He heard the sliding of metallic portals outside. Finally their own door was opened and they were politely helped out. They seemed to be in a great metal bus station of some kind. Policemen dressed exactly like the two who brought them here, were milling

around, going to glass windows, posting strange-looking devices on giant bulletin boards, standing before panels of blinking lights and dials, noting down figures.

The strange part—*they all looked exactly alike*. Hal rubbed his eyes, to be sure. Yes, there were at least a hundred men here, as alike as a hundred peas in a pod.

They were taken into a smaller room, up to a desk. Hal sighed with relief when he saw that the man sitting behind the desk had a different kind of face. It had begun to get monotonous.

"Ah, Doctor Dietrich," the man greeted, arising. He shook hands awkwardly with Hal. "Strange custom, you Earth people have," he smiled, "this clasping of hands. But—" he shrugged. "Come with me."

The blonde girl plucked at his elbow. "Hey, doc," she whispered huskily, "what is all this hocuspocus? I'm gettin' scared—"

Before he had a chance to answer, a policeman came out of a doorway and took her arm. "The women must wait in here," he said courteously and led her away.

A door opened and Hal found himself in a large auditorium chamber. A group of about a hundred men were sitting in rows of chairs, facing an elevated pedestal at one end of the room. On the pedestal was a desk the size of a piano. Behind the desk sat the biggest man Hal had

ever seen. The man was over eight feet tall and must have weighed four hundred pounds. A soft, pastel glow illuminated the pedestal and the giant.

As soon as Hal was seated, the big man tapped on his desk with a ruler. "Gentlemen," his voice boomed, "I see that our last guest has arrived. If you will please come to order, we may proceed."

Hal thought that it was something like a U.N. meeting he'd seen in newsreels. Over half the men in the audience were holding listening devices to their ears. Up behind glass panels in the walls sat men with microphones obviously translating the big man's speech.

"We have chosen, to the best of our ability, the world's finest minds," the big man boomed on. "Now we must screen out the physically unqualified. I regret, gentlemen, that only one of you can be spared. This one will be chosen according to heredity factors which we have learned are highly important in Earth's generations. We have not had time to gather data on you, therefore you must be questioned. The age your forebears attained will be important. Also their fertility. A man must be chosen with the greatest potentiality for a long and reproductive life. He will be the Survivor."

A stir of excited whispering ran through the crowd.

The big man indicated a machine

on his desk. "We did not have time to study your physiology and psychology sufficiently to construct a lie detection apparatus. So, we will use one of your machines. It is a very crude and inefficient device, but it must be used." He added, "We use the lie detector because there may be some among you selfish enough to try to save your own life by speaking untruths."

Hal Tribble sat in the crowd mystified, bewildered and more than a little terrified. He had not the faintest conception about what was going on. But it seemed pretty obvious that in escaping Death Row, he'd jumped from the frying pan into a much hotter fire.

Most of what the big man said went over his head, but he grasped the fact that all the people here were going to be murdered except the one who could lay claim to the oldest, the healthiest, and the most fruitful grandparents.

When it was time for Hal Tribble, alias Doctor Noah J. Dietrich, to answer the questions, he approached the lie detector with some confidence.

The theory of the lie detector is based on physiological and pathological changes arising out of the inner psychological conflicts caused by telling a lie. The weakness in this is the supposition of a conscience in the questioned—or at least the ability to differentiate between a lie and the truth.

In the case of Hal Tribble, a lie detector was stumped because he had been telling lies for so many years, he sometimes forgot what was the truth and what wasn't. That was the reason why Marvin Liddell had picked him to bump off a bothersome rival. "They can't convict you with a lie detector, Hal," Marvin had assured him. "Why, you'll get off scot free!" He would have too, except for an unfortunate and unexpected witness.

Now the eight-foot judge put the questions to him.

"Your name, please?"

"Doctor Noah J. Dietrich," Hal answered without blinking an eye.

The huge man consulted the dials. There was no minute change in blood pressure, pulse rate, breathing. No opening of sweat glands. All the dials pointed to normal.

"Doctor Dietrich, are your parents still living?"

"Yes, sir," Hal answered politely.

"Well, then. How about your grandparents? At what age did they die?"

"They didn't."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I say, they didn't. They're still alive."

The Judge's eyebrows went up. He consulted the dials. "What is their present age?"

"Let me see," Hal murmured, rubbing his chin. "Granny must be about a hundred and ten now, and Granddad is two years older."

The Judge examined all the lie detector dials. He called an associate and they studied the machine together, murmuring in a strange, foreign tongue.

The Judge faced him again. "Your great-grandparents," he said grimly. "Don't tell me they are still alive?"

"No, sir," Hal answered. "Great-grandmother was scalped by the Indians. She was ninety-six at the time. My great-grandfather was shot, at the age of eighty-seven, by a jealous husband. He was quite a scoundrel with the women, you know," Hal confided.

"Hasn't there been a natural death in your family at all?"

"Not that I can remember," Hal admitted.

"How many uncles and aunts do you have?"

"Ten uncles," Hal answered, "and thirteen aunts. All living."

The Judge told him to wait in a chamber off to the left.

Hal sat there for quite a while. Then the Judge entered. He touched a button and one wall became transparent. Hal could see all the other men filing out of the auditorium, one by one.

"Hey," he suddenly cried, excitedly, "that one looked like the President of the United States!"

"It was," the Judge answered. "He was chosen as one of the Earth's one hundred most intelligent men."

Hal's eyes grew larger as he rec-

ognized other world-famous faces among the passing group—philosophers, religious leaders, statesmen, scientists whose pictures he had seen on television and micro-film newspapers.

The Judge clapped him on the shoulder. "Let me congratulate you, Doctor Dietrich. Out of the entire Earth population, you have been chosen as the man with the greatest combination of intellect, potential longevity and reproductive ability. You will be the Survivor."

Hal spluttered, aghast. "Look, there's been a mistake. I—I—"

"Please," the Judge said sternly, holding up a hand. "There isn't much time. Come."

They started out of the chamber.

"Oh," the Judge said, pausing, "I presume you will wish to keep the woman? Your wife? She has been examined and passes all physical requirements, although her I.Q. is somewhat deficient. We could substitute her if you wish, or you may keep her. We want you to be entirely happy with the woman who survives with you. That will have a strong bearing on the matter of repopulation. We have found through our studies that an emotional element seems to be a factor in the mating of you Earth people."

Hal said woodenly, "I don't care." His head was buzzing and aching.

They passed through several doors and Hal found himself again on the ramp before the flying ma-

chine that had brought him here. Now, he saw that it was a small jet-propelled job, instead of a copter as he'd first thought.

This time he was seated in the front of the ship, which seemed to be a kind of observation room with a wide glass front. He was placed in a comfortable chair. The Judge sat next to him. Presently, the blonde, still in her trench coat, but appearing a bit more disheveled, was brought into the plane and seated beside Hal.

"What 'kinda mess is this?" she whispered to him savagely. "They made me take all my clothes off and take all kinda screwy tests." She now appeared more indignant than frightened. "I've been hauled down to the precinct station before, but I never had to go through all—"

"Shut up," Hal said wearily.

He heard steel doors roll away. There was a sudden breathtaking acceleration. Once they were under way, there was no sound or feeling of movement. They were again in a gray world of everlasting rain.

The Judge pointed to the metal sphere their small craft had just left. "A space station, Doctor, one thousand miles above your little U. S. Satellite." He pointed below them, to a flash of light in the boiling gray clouds. "I regret that we had to destroy your little satellite. It was an admirable achievement, considering your primitive and clumsy methods."

The Judge fell silent until they

were down close to the Earth's surface, skimming a few hundred feet above the stormy gray seas. "This is the location of London, England. You see it is completely below the surface of the water. And here is Paris. Some of the tops of the highest buildings and the Eiffel Tower can still be seen between the waves."

They made a tour of the world. Destruction greeted them everywhere they went.

The Judge sighed. "It is a pity. We from Vega are grieved to have been forced to use such desperate measures as this flood. But you Earthlings have been the source of a growing panic throughout the populated areas of the universe. In recent suns your mechanical and scientific advances have entirely outgrown your philosophical and social development. Your morals have declined. First the Atom bomb, then the H-bomb, then the U. S. Satellite, now the Super H-bomb. Good heavens, man, do you realize that you are one step from the key to the chain reaction that would explode the entire universe?" The Judge shook his head. "We can't let children play with such dangerous toys."

Hal saw them approaching what looked like a gigantic metal sphere, floating on the storm-tossed surface of the black ocean.

"We would be overstepping our authority to destroy all life from the face of the Earth," the Judge muttered. "It would not please the Su-

preme Being. A fresh start perhaps. A new approach—"

The top of the sphere opened and they glided to a landing inside it.

"Listen," Hal said, wiping at the rivulets of sweat coursing down his thin, pointed face. "I got to tell you something. You made a mistake about me. I can't—"

"Now, then, Doctor. No altruistic displays of self-sacrifice. Your life has been spared for the good of Earth. From what we have learned about the strong heredity factor in Earthlings, we are sure your children will inherit many of your fine traits of penetrating intelligence, moral insight, and deep philosophy. Now then." He opened a small case and took out a hypodermic syringe. "You have a long wait. This will eliminate many weeks of boredom."

"Wait a minute!" Hal cried frantically. "You've got to listen. You've got to—"

But the needle plunged into his forearm, and his vocal chords became paralysed instantly. A delicious numbness crept upward from his toes. The last thing he heard the Judge say gently was:

"Farewell, Survivor. In ten thousand years we shall return. Perhaps then we can be friends with your progeny."

For forty days and forty nights, the black rains fell, and the earth was covered and all life perished from the earth. The ships were de-

stroyed by storms and the tallest mountains disappeared far beneath the black seas. Only one thing remained afloat—a giant silver sphere of some strange light metallic substance.

On the forty-first day, the gray clouds thinned and parted and the sun shone through. The stormy seas quieted. Here and there, dripping islands appeared. They soon dried in the sun and were covered with a lush tropical vegetation.

The silver sphere floated up on the shores of one of these beautiful islands. An automatic timing device whirled and sides of the sphere opened and ramps lowered to the ground.

In their compartment, Hal Tribble and the blonde girl rubbed their eyes and sat up with prodigious yawns. The sunlight beamed in on Hal's face, warming it. He arose stiffly and walked out, down the ramp to the beach. There, he sat on the sand.

He watched the animals coming down the other ramps. Always in pairs. Two of each. Two cows, two dogs, two elephants, two horses . . .

The blonde girl came and sat beside him. She unbuttoned the trench coat and let the sun warm her beautiful golden body. Hal had been right in his suspicion about what was under the coat.

"Noah," the girl said, looking straight ahead, "there's somethin' about me I think you oughta know.

If—if," she blushed, "we're gonna live on this island alone and all."

"Yes?" Hal asked.

"You know that day I came runnin' into your apartment and asked for you to tell the police I was your wife? Well," she bit her lips, "I was afraid they were coming to check on me. You know—the new tough laws they got about call girls. It's all right if you pay the cops off, but I hadn't been. Most of the other girls left New York when the floods came. But I stuck around figuring I could make a pile. And I thought the rains would stop any day . . ."

Hal let his breath out with a soft whistle. He picked up a stick.

"I—I wanted you to know," the girl said miserably. "About what kind of person I'd been, I mean. I wanted you to know the truth."

Hal jabbed the stick in the sand. "Well," he said, "I was wondering about those guys from Vega. I was wondering if they were really human beings or not, and I guess they sure are because they pulled a sweet boner."

"What do you mean?" She looked at him with wide blue eyes.

"Look who they got to repopulate the Earth. A murderer and a prostitute!"

The girl stared at him.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

He was down on his knees in the sand.

"I'm praying," he answered. • • •

# The PENFIELD MISADVENTURE

HE DIDN'T MEAN TO DO IT—TO KILL HIS  
UNCLE BEFORE HE HIMSELF WAS BORN!

by August  
Derleth

**"THE QUEEREST** assignment I ever had?" mused Tex Harrigan, looking morosely into the tea his doctor had prescribed to take the place of his customary bourbon. "I think it was the Penfield matter. I'm still not sure I didn't temporarily lose my mind, that time."

"Is that bad?" I wanted to know.

"Don't be flip." He gazed at me malevolently. "Could be, it's the people around me. You've never heard me talk about Roscoe or Harriet Penfield, have you?"

"I don't remember."

"Well, it happened years back, in the 1940s. And it was not the assignment I'd be much given to talk about. One of those things that might have been or might not, depending on the precise condition of my mind."

"All right," I said. "You've got a story. Let's hear it."

"Not exactly a story. A story usually has a nice, rounded, pat ending—this one didn't have." He sighed. "This thing began one day





when the *Chicago Tribune* sent me out to track down a whack of a kid named Roscoe Penfield. He was said to have evolved a new theory of time travel. You get these genius I. Q. boys once in a while, and they really have something, but most of the time they're about as solid as the average end-of-the-world prophet.

"Well, I went out. The kid's parents had been killed in a highway accident three years or so before, I understood, and he lived with his cousin, Dr. Harriet Penfield, whose father had been driving the death car and had been killed in the same accident. She was close to forty, had a lot of college degrees, and was a mathematician employed at Ignatius College. The two of them lived in a penthouse on the edge of the Loop, and the set-up looked like money.

"I explained why I had come.

"Dr. Penfield was hardly amused. 'That is a rigmarole of nonsense, young man,' she said in a genuinely professorial manner. 'My cousin seldom lets a day go by without some brainstorm or other.'

"May I talk to him?' I persisted.

"He's out on the roof somewhere.'

"The kid was about eighteen. Owl-eyed, with spectacles, and blonde hair too long for him, partly in his eyes. He looked and was a precocious brat. He had some kind of contraption that looked as if it had been put together with pieces

rescued from a used car lot; he was working on the thing when I came out.

"Are you the man from the observatory?' he wanted to know.

"I told him who I was.

"I'm not ready for publicity,' he said. 'Besides, Harriet wouldn't like it.'

"What is that thing?'

"I'm afraid it embodies scientific principles an ordinary reporter couldn't begin to grasp,' he said with an air that made me want to take him over my knees.

"It looks like a time machine,' I guessed.

"He snorted. 'It looks like an imperfect helicopter, thanks.'

"Well, after using up a lot of patience I got something out of him. He claimed to have gone back into time—nothing about going forward. That, he said, he hadn't perfected yet. He said he had gone back as much as fifty years, but beyond that he was vague. Either he didn't want to go farther than that or he couldn't go. He spoke with a good deal of authority about time past, but he didn't say anything he couldn't have got out of a book somewhere.

"Just how do you travel back in time?' I asked him.

"Why, counter-clockwise,' he came back. I had the feeling he was guying me.

"I couldn't get any more out of him. When I came back into the penthouse, Dr. Penfield only raised

her eyebrows, and said, "You see!"

When the reporter had gone and cousin Harriet was out, too, Penfield got into his machine and faced a complication of buttons, panels, and levers. He knew very well what he was doing, however. He set his controls. He started the machine, which made scarcely any noise, and presently it rose straight up. The city dwindled below, then vanished. If all went well—and there was no reason why it should not—Roscoe would come down near Fernview, Illinois, in his grandfather's back forty, at about the turn of the century. He had done so before, so often that he was becoming a familiar figure in that country neighborhood.

Presently the machine began to descend.

The familiar landscape came into sight—the woods almost ringing the field, the great, boxlike house, the brook, the millpond. By gazing intently, Roscoe could make out the two boys, Leander and Albert, as usual, at the pond.

He set the machine gently down, pushed it over to the edge of the wood, and concealed it as best he could. This required no concentration and involved little difficulty, for the field, having been planted, farm; both the old man and the hired man were occupied in other fields; it was not therefore necessary was not visited by anyone from the to hide the machine so thoroughly

as to impede hasty departure.

He skirted the edge of the field, went around in back of the farm buildings, and came out at the mill, an abandoned structure of considerable age. The boys fished just beyond the mill-race. Leander, who was the older of them, was destined to become Harriet's father; Albert, his own. There was only five years between them, Leander being seventeen, and Albert twelve. They had become accustomed to Roscoe some time ago, for Roscoe had appeared as a "new boy" in the neighborhood, and had been accepted. Because he looked younger than his age, Leander patronized him, with an annoyingly superior air. Roscoe could still smart physically at the spankings his uncle gave him when Roscoe was but ten or thereabouts.

"How're they biting?" asked Roscoe, coming around the mill-race.

"With their mouths," said Leander. "Stupid."

"Why didn't you bring your pole?" asked Albert.

Roscoe only shrugged. Truth to tell, he did not own any angling equipment whatsoever, he had never seen an old-fashioned cane pole; he had supposed, until his venture backward into time, that fly-rods and casting-rods were the sole weapons with which fish were engaged. He had grown up so much less free than his ancestors that he appreciated these little journeys all the more.

"Roscoe's afraid of the fish," said Leander.

"Here, use my pole," said Albert. "I've got ten sunfish already."

Roscoe took the pole and sat down to watch the cork.

Leander's derision went on unchecked. "Had any more dreams lately?" he asked. "About all you do, Roscoe, is have good dreams."

Roscoe had got into the habit of telling them something of the wonders of his age as if they were dreams.

"Sure," he said. "Wait till I catch just one fish."

"Watch your cork. There's one nibbling at your worm."

"About a week later," said Harrigan, "Dr. Penfield rang me up and asked me to stop over. I could tell that she was worried about something. I went over as soon as I could. She met me at the door."

"Mr. Harrigan, I'm beginning to think I'm not taking my cousin seriously enough," she said.

"What's he done?"

"He does things I can't account for. Remember the last time you were here? Well, I went out shortly after. We left Roscoe on the roof with his invention. When I got back six hours later, what do you suppose he was doing?"

"No idea," I said. "I haven't known any other precocious boys."

"He was frying himself a couple of sunfish."

"Yeah," I said stupidly. "What about it?"

"Fresh sunfish, Mr. Harrigan. Now, even if you could easily pick them up in this neighborhood in Chicago, the elevator man said Roscoe hadn't left the penthouse. I asked Roscoe where he got them, and he said he caught them. Six hours, Mr. Harrigan. He would hardly have had time to cycle out to a place he could conceivably catch sunfish. That's taking in all the possibilities."

"I saw her point. Sunfish were not to be caught just by dangling a worm on a hook over the nearest building parapet into the canyons of the Chicago Loop."

"And that isn't all," she went on. "Just come out here."

"I followed her to the roof. There stood the machine, just as I had seen it that first visit. She went over to it."

"Now, if you'll look, you'll see that the machine has been moved."

"I could see that and said so. I pointed out, however, that Roscoe was big enough to push it around."

"That's true enough," she conceded. "But wouldn't the wheels leave something of a mark? There's none here. It's just as if it had been picked up and put down over here."

"There's probably a very simple explanation for it. Why not ask Roscoe?"

"We waited for Roscoe. He came along about an hour later, and we put the questions to him. He said

simply that he had taken the machine out. As for the sunfish, why, he had gone fishing that day in a millpond out of Fernview, Illinois.

"How perfectly absurd!" cried Dr. Penfield. "Fernview is almost four hundred miles from here. How do you expect me to believe that?"

"I don't," admitted the kid. "If you reject the fundamental premise, it's only natural that you have to reject all the others."

"Not another thing could be got out of him."

Today, Roscoe decided, I'll tell them about helicopters.

"Go on, tell us your dream," urged Leander. "It can't be more impossible than the last one."

"It's about a flying-machine," began Roscoe, choosing his words carefully. "A machine of a different kind from the other—" He had already told them about airplanes. "This one could fly straight up, and it could come straight down, too. It could hover and move around in the smallest space."

"If you accept the principle you talked about in the other flying machine, this one is unsound," said Leander promptly.

"Of course it isn't," replied Roscoe with spirit. "You just have to give the supporting surfaces an approximately vertical thrust. You could do it by arranging for the rotating device on the top instead of the front of the machine."

"How could you control it?" asked Leander.

"You carry a power plant."

Leander frowned. Albert listened in wide-eyed amazement.

"What if it failed?"

"Well, you shouldn't have any more trouble than in an airplane."

"If this were as simple as you make it sound, I should think it would have been invented a long time ago," said Leander with studied scorn. "They've been talking about men flying ever since Icarus. It hasn't happened and it never will."

"Don't be so sure, Leander," retorted Roscoe. How curious it was that Leander at seventeen was capable of developing in him the same fury that the man Leander was to become was destined to arouse in Roscoe at ten. This was the trap Roscoe must avoid, for sooner or later he was likely to burst out into expression of his rage, just as he had done in childhood, kicking and screaming and beating at his uncle.

"But I am sure," replied Leander. "A man's got to be sure of some things, and I'm sure man isn't going to fly. He wasn't meant to."

"You talk like—like an old fogey of an uncle of mine," said Roscoe.

"Sometimes the old fogies know more than the young fogies."

"They do not!" Roscoe was indignant. That anyone like Leander, who was, after all, only a country bumpkin, to contradict Roscoe Penfield, with his genius I. Q., was pro-

foundly insulting. "I know men will be able to fly some day."

"In that flying machine you dreamed up?" Leander jeered.

"Sure. It works on the same principle as my machine," answered Roscoe heatedly. "Except that it won't move in time, only in space."

He had no sooner spoken than he knew he had made a slip: Country bumpkin or no, Leander was sharp.

"Your machine," he echoed. "What machine?"

"I've got a kind of machine," began Roscoe cautiously.

"A toy?" interjected Albert.

"Yes, you might say it's a toy."

"Another dream?" asked Albert helpfully.

"Another dream," said Roscoe.

Leander licked his lips. He was looking intently at Roscoe now.

"Come to think of it, Roscoe, you wear funny clothes."

"I do not."

"Never saw the like before. I don't have any like that and Albert hasn't and Pa hasn't and our hired man hasn't and nobody we see in church Sundays has."

"Maybe they're poor and can't afford anything better," said Albert.

"Where do you live, Roscoe?" persisted Leander.

"I told you—Chicago."

"Sure, and you said you came down here and visited with relatives. What relatives?"

"My grandfather and my uncles," said Roscoe, relishing this truth.

"There don't nobody live around here, outside of Fernview, fits that description," said Leander, his eyes narrowed.

Roscoe came to his feet in one bound. "So I'm a liar, huh? So you're sneaking around behind my back trying to find something wrong with me. Well, that's not the kind of friends I like."

Leander was taken aback. Roscoe stalked off to the noise of Albert's cries of consternation and the younger boy's loud recriminations against his brother. If only, thought Roscoe, they stay where they are and don't take it into their heads to follow me! Once he got to the woods, he could dodge them easily enough.

He reached the woods and vanished into them, before Leander came to life and began to run after him.

"It couldn't have been more than a few days later that I stopped in there again," said Harrigan. "I found Dr. Penfield quite upset, indeed."

"'Look here, Mr. Harrigan,' she opened up on me right away, 'I've just gone through Roscoe's things, and I've come up with quite an assortment I can't account for.'"

"'Any boy is apt to collect trifles,' I said.

"'These aren't trifles, Mr. Harrigan.'"

"Nor were they. It's some years

back now, but as nearly as I can remember them they included three complete sets of mint stamps of the Columbian commemoratives, coins of the same period, some valuable decorative pieces circa 1880, and certain odds and ends which might be an integral part of any boy's life."

"What's so unusual about such a find?" I put in.

"Basically, I suppose, the time wasn't right. When was it, 1946 or so? Mint Columbians just weren't easy to pick up in complete sets. He had *three*. Sure, I know, he had money to buy them. But where did he get them? The coins were a little more common, I grant that; he *might* have picked them up from some collector. After all, his cousin wasn't in the habit of following him around. There was just the outside possibility that he had managed to accumulate them in the course of his life in Chicago."

"There was no way of knowing how long he had had them?" I asked.

Harrigan shook his head.

"What did Roscoe say about them?"

"Oh, the same old story. He had brought them back from his trips into the past. He made it sound so damned logical, but, of course, it was ridiculous, and when I charged him with it, he just laughed.

"Remember the story of Doubting Thomas, Mr. Harrigan," he said. "Or maybe you don't read the Bible."

"I promised Dr. Penfield I'd look

around Roscoe's room next day . . ."

*Roscoe was of two minds about going back.*

*For one thing, knowing Leander as he did, he was certain that his uncle would have devised some trap; he would want above all else to see "the machine". On the other hand, the lure of the place was irresistible; he enjoyed that feeling of superiority—to be back in time actually talking to his father and uncle, who could not know that they and his mother would all die together in that terrible accident. He could, actually play at their games, join in their fun, and know that among other things that Leander, who professed such scorn for girls, would be married in three years, and Albert would not marry until much later in life. This game had an inordinate attraction for him; it lent spindle-legged, owl-eyed Roscoe Penfield the superiority of a god.*

*In the end, he slipped into the machine when Harriet had gone to work next morning, and was off into the past once more.*

*He knew he must be very cautious, however.*

*He was twice as careful about hiding the machine, and, when he moved toward the house and grounds, he went with extreme wariness. He saw the boys at last, on the far side of the pond—the deep side—with sailboats. He went around the pond where the mill was,*

and walked catlike among the willows and alders so as to come up behind the boys and leave the way clear for him to disappear if they were hostile.

Albert saw him first. "There's Roscoe!" he cried.

Leander looked around casually. "Ever sail a boat, Roscoe?" he called.

"No, but I can try."

So they had forgotten. Roscoe came confidently out of the willows and ran to the edge of the pond.

No sooner had he reached Leander's side than Leander fell upon him, bearing him to the ground and pinning him there.

"Now we got you, Roscoe. Albert, run and fetch that rope from the mill—you know, the one we hid till Roscoe came back."

Albert obediently ran.

Leander gloated. "This time you won't get away without showing us your machine. We know you're not visiting around here because we asked all around. We're going to tie you up and if you don't lead us to where it is, you can rot for all we care."

In a near panic, Roscoe knew he must act before Albert returned. For the moment, however, there was nothing he could do. Leander had his shoulders pinned to the grass and was sitting astride him; since Leander was heavier than Roscoe, there was nothing for it but to wait until Leander became over-confident. Roscoe relaxed and grinned.

"Think you're smart," he said.

"We'll see who's so smart," retorted Leander.

"Look. There's a stone or something under my right shoulder. Ease up a little on the pressure, will you?"

Leander obligingly did so. Instantly Roscoe arched his body, and with a rapidly freed hand, taught Leander a brief lesson in judo. Leander catapulted over Roscoe's head and landed in the pond.

"I can't swim!" he shouted.

"I'm wise to your tricks," Roscoe shouted in answer and sprinted away just as Albert came out of the mill with a coil of rope.

He got to the machine and climbed in, filled with regret. He knew this was the last time he could come back to Fernview, the last time. He felt all the pangs of parting as the machine vaulted into the heavens.

"Now this is the part of the story that just doesn't add up. It could be that somehow I was the victim of the whackiest kind of hallucination you ever heard of," continued Har-rigan. "I can't swear now that what happened before that last visit did actually take place. I thought for a while it was a dream, now I'm not even sure it had the reality of a dream. But I remember that last visit as vividly as I remember anything about those queer assignments of mine. I can still see the kid muttering about having altered events by



what he did. I can still see how indignant his parents were."

"His parents!" I put in. "You said they were killed in an accident."

"Alleged," he answered. "Brought about by Roscoe's Uncle Leander, who was driving. But you see, if there wasn't any Uncle Leander, there couldn't have been such an accident, could there? But don't let me get ahead of the story."

"I went there that last day looking for Dr. Penfield. I found Roscoe sitting white as a bank of new-fallen snow, and stiff as an icicle, being lectured to by an elderly fellow and a woman who was clearly his wife."

"What do you want?" asked the lecturer, when his wife had let me in.

"Forgive me," I said, just as uncertain as I felt, "I came up, I thought, to find a Dr. Penfield. Wasn't her first name Harriet?"

"I'm Dr. Penfield," said he. "Dr. Albert Penfield."

"I tell you, I was as confused as a man can get and still hang on to sanity. Dr. Harriet Penfield was nowhere in evidence; nor was there any sign of any of her possessions. Moreover, my memory of her seemed to be fading even as I talked about her."

"Roscoe's cousin," I said.

"I'm afraid Roscoe has misled you," he said. "He has no cousins. My only brother, Leander, was drowned in the millpond on our father's farm when he was seventeen. Roscoe is a very imaginative boy. I had no idea

he had impressed anyone else with this fable; I thought we were the first to learn of it."

"Well, I tried to track down Dr. Harriet Penfield. After all, I had seen her name in print. Or had I? I had looked her up in *Who's Who* and found her there with almost half a column. Or had I? It was a cinch I couldn't find any word about her after that, even though I went through the files of *Who's Who* for the previous ten years. I went around to Ignatius College, where I had understood she had taught, and couldn't find a soul who remembered her. Nor was she on the teaching rolls. Roscoe could have hired someone to impersonate her, but then, what of those references I had read before? Or had I? You see? I've been asking myself ever since whose bad dream I was in."

"As for Roscoe, they had to send him to a sanitarium for quite a little while. They had found him on the roof that night where he had evidently fallen from something. He talked about his 'time' machine, but of course, there was nothing of that sort there—nor a machine of any kind, though I'd have sworn I saw one. He kept accusing himself of having murdered not only his Uncle Leander, but also his cousin Harriet, and of having wiped out an entire sequence of events in time. It took him quite a while to get over that obsession. I'm not sure I quite got over mine." • • •



**T**HE ALIEN drifted into normal space between the orbits of Earth and Mars through a shimmering phosphorescent haze of its own making, its long invisible feelers stretching out in all directions even before the materialization was complete. It paused, like a shining ghost; then the pulsing cold light died, and its scanners searched about the blackness with piercing electronic eyes which saw the space station.

George Harmon did not see the spaceship materialize. He failed even to detect the signals that warned of an approaching body—space was too full of meteors, planetoids, chunks of rock. He should have noticed, and normally he would have, for it was his job as Stationmaster to do so. But his thoughts

were millions of miles away, on Earth, where they should not have been.

He was wondering what it would be like seeing Earth again after ten long years, to walk again in his own body, to breathe as a human would, to be able to stretch his arms and legs and know that he was truly alive.

The first years had been the hardest, trying to adjust to giving up human qualities to become a space station. Often during that time he had gazed in upon himself, upon his human body, and wondered if the pension given to Stationmasters was worth the years of isolation. He had examined his apparently lifeless body encased in its plastic cylinder of preserving, protecting liquid,

# MANY DREAMS of EARTH

by Charles E. Fritch

A STATIONMASTER IN SPACE HAS MEMORIES AND HE  
HAS HOPE. HOW LONG CAN HOPE LAST?

carefully traced the spiderweb wires fastened by surgery which plunged from all directions into his brain toward predetermined contacts. The wires stretched through the space station like veins and arteries and nerves, making the station a living thing.

The transformation had been complete. The space station was almost indestructable, made to last a million generations, self-sufficient. It even had a fuse, a mechanical conscience, that prevented the Stationmaster from cracking up under the strain of so unusual an occupation. They had plugged him, like some great electronic tube, into the hub of the station, and from that moment on he had ceased to exist. From that instant he ceased to be George Har-

mon, Earthling, *homo sapiens*. From that moment on he was Space Station 42, a mechanical entity patrolling an orbit between Earth and Mars—on a ten year tour of duty.

Ten years was a long time, but the pension would be worth it. He had thought so when he had volunteered and he thought it again now. But in between those times were others when he wasn't as certain, for ten years was a long time. Any place it would be long, but out here in space, alone, it was an eternity. Alone. That was a lonely word; the very sound of it made you feel cold and lonely, made you want someone to talk to. But there was no one. No one but occasional passing ships whose operators were in a hurry to get back to green Earth and had no

desire to talk with space stations, however human.

He had watched Earth roll on beneath him, followed it in its flight to nowhere along the path of its orbit, and he felt a longing. But before the longing had gotten too severe, a fuse broke an electronic connection and he felt once more at ease.

The first years were frantic ones. Though his body no longer functioned, his mind retained the images, the pseudo-sensations that had once stimulated him. He felt these stimuli, as an amputee imagines sensation in a non-existent limb. They had selected him carefully, putting him through batteries of tests both physical and psychological, yet he felt at times he would surely go mad. At times he felt like he had an itchy nose and no arms.

Yet he had many arms, many eyes. Slowly, he learned to control his new body that was metal and quartz and fine wire. He learned to read the gauges and the indicators, learned to shift the station through space to avoid collision, to swing the telescopes and gaze intently at the planets and the stars and the distant nebulae and at nothing. Mentally he roamed the still, silent corridors of his body and tried to find peace.

*And while his mind considered these thoughts, the alien surveyed the station, came cautiously closer.*

During the first years he often played the music machines and made them spew forth an indeter-

minable number of melodies to fit his many moods. He read the recorded books, volumes which spoke to him in magic syllables of poetry and song. He set hidden films into motion and watched three-dimensional images enact an infinite variety of scenes. But even while watching these and listening to them he knew that this was the stuff of dreams, unreal,<sup>6</sup> and it failed to satisfy him. After a while he no longer used them.

The years passed, and the once exciting new work became dull, routine. Even green, silent Earth became merely another planet to observe with unemotional interest. The years passed, one, two, five, seven, nine. Or perhaps not even that much, though it seemed much more. Out here time had no personal meaning, was merely something necessary to the coordination of other factors, units of measurement to be filed and forgotten with other useless and uninteresting data. He had no chronometer that measured Earth time, for space stations could not be clock watchers, lest they become deficient in mechanical duties.

At first, he had counted the rotations of Earth, and its revolutions, and then his own passage through space about the distant sun, and then he didn't bother counting at all. His impatience had been mental, but he slowly came to know that machines have no reason for impatience. Machines carry out their prescribed

duties with patience, humility and efficiency, and they wait until the day when those duties are no longer necessary.

For George Harmon that day would come, but he didn't exactly know when. At the end of ten years certainly, but exactly when that was he didn't know. He'd lost track of time, but he was confident that it was not long in coming. He was certain his relief would be prompt. When his time was up, they would come for him and then he would know. It was better that way, he realized, than to wait and count off the silent years and months and days and minutes and seconds. They would come and they would detach the wires that connected him to the nerves controlling the station and take his unaged body back to Earth, where they would restore it to life.

To Earth. He had seldom thought of it during the long years, but suddenly those were magic words. He closed his eyes to what lay outside and heard only the vague unceasing throb of the rocket heart in the hub beneath him. Then that slowly faded and he forgot the station and the blank expanse of nothing that surrounded him. For a moment he was back again on Earth, on good old Earth, thinking of it as he had not thought of it for years and years.

His mind was suddenly full of green grass and the cool fresh summer's air stirring gold-tipped trees and the shaded porches and the me-

ludious tinkle of ice in frosted lemonade glasses. He could almost taste the lemony liquid, as he thought about it, almost feel his mouth pucker pleasantly at the remembrance. To his ears came the rusty chuckle of the old porch swing as it resigned itself to another season, and from across the street a girlish laughter came that fell like gently shattering crystals into the lengthening afternoon. The years held no meaning, they were a dream which time would erase and replace; the years ahead held hope, joy, reality. As he thought about it, mental tears flowed from the eyes of his mind, and he knew, gratefully, he was still human.

*The alien, meanwhile, glided silently toward the space station, feeling it with invisible fingers which recorded the fact that a mind resided within the metal interior. It detected and automatically recorded such secondarily important facts as the station's mass, its orbital speed, noted details of construction and composition, and other factors immediately or potentially pertinent. But one fact stood out among all others—there was a mind aboard. A mind! The fact was surprising in itself, but a further fact was noted by the brain emanations. It was a mind similar to the alien's.*

*The spaceship drifted closer, curious yet ready for any surprise move the station might make. Inside, a heavy-suited figure watched the station grow large on a screen and held*

*its two tentacles in readiness over the controls. The gap narrowed between the two. The alien extended grapplers which reached out over and under the station and closed down on it.*

The resounding clang of the grapplers shook the station and brought George Harmon out of his lethargy. Cursing, he activated the outer viewcreens, noticing grimly that the warning lights had been flashing and he had not seen them. He felt sick. Then he felt angry.

The screens leaped into life. Through the overhead viewscreen he saw the crablike metal arc of the top pincer holding the station in a magnetic grip. The side screen showed the alien ship itself, metal and cigar-shaped like an Earthling's craft, with long tailfins and wings cut in bizarre patterns on the trailing edges.

Mentally, he cursed again and automatically swung the huge turreted proton guns to bear on the stranger. He couldn't fire, of course, not at this range, but if he could get loose—A further thought activated the anti-magnetism device and a sudden burst of jets designed to shrug off the alien. The jets flared, and he poised a mental finger over the controls of the proton cannon, waiting for the pincers to disengage. But the grapplers held. He found himself cursing again. For the second time in all the long cursable years, anger surged within him.

He tried the radio, thinking that Earth would send help. But the tubes remained stubbornly silent beneath his directions. He felt like he was sweating. It was impossible, of course. Machines don't sweat. Yet machines don't fear either, and George Harmon felt suddenly afraid.

A voice said to him: "Resist and you will be destroyed. I am coming aboard. Open your lock." It was a voice and yet not a voice; it was almost as though it were a thought of his own.

Telepathy, he thought. Or else insanity.

The side screen showed an airlock on the alien ship opening. A space-suited figure emerged, a figure resembling an Earthling, and drifted toward the space station, a strange box under one arm.

The creature was dangerously close to one of the maneuvering jets, he noted, and his thoughts strayed to the activating machine. But perhaps the alien was friendly. Friendly, the next thought came, attacking a space station? He had a perfect right to destroy it. His time might nearly be up now; he couldn't afford to take chances. Before he could change his mind, he activated the mechanism.

But the jet didn't fire. He tried again. Again. Frantically, he probed the machinery, tracing every facet of its construction. Nothing was wrong, nothing. Nothing except that it wouldn't work.

With growing concern, he watched the alien approach his airlock. The airlock had been put there almost as an afterthought, to accommodate any mechanics that might be necessary to repair possible breakdowns in the station or survivors of spaceship collisions with meteors. But he had had no visitors during his period in space, and he was certain he wanted none now. He had no intention of opening the airlock.

He watched the alien pause, hesitating on the outer rim. It made a motion over the box it carried, and the airlock popped open. The space-suited figure entered the station, and the airlock closed tightly behind it.

He activated the airlock view-screen and saw the alien contemplating the inner door. The creature considered the door only briefly, and then it was no longer a barrier. The door swung open without a struggle, and the alien stepped through. George Harmon switched on the viewscreen in the corridor in which the creature now stood peering about. It seemed to be looking about for something resembling itself, and George smiled a mental smile although his position was steadily becoming precarious.

A voice said in his mind: "Where are you? I wish to talk with you."

"Talk then," George thought back. "I'm listening."

"I want to see you," the other insisted.

"You are seeing me. I am the space station."

"A robot?" the creature said, surprised. "Then you will not mind if I destroy you."

"Wait!" George cried, mentally wetting his lips. It was funny how the old human traits predominated in a feared situation. Frantically, he searched the space station for weapons and found none. "Why would you wish to destroy me?" he evaded finally. "Even a machine has purpose."

"And what is your purpose?"

"My purpose?" He was surprised at the question, and then even more surprised at his inability to answer it automatically. Yet he had not really considered any purpose in his doing this other than earning himself a pension. Certainly he could not give that answer. What were space stations for, anyway? "Why, as contact points, of course," he answered finally. "For ships traveling through space, going from Earth to the outer planets of the solar system, and from outer planets to Earth. Just in case any get lost or damaged, well, here I am to help them."

"And have you?" the alien wondered. "How long is it since you've been contacted by anyone?"

George Harmon gave a mental shrug. He tried to remember and found he didn't recall ever having been contacted. "It hasn't been necessary. They build ships good on Earth. I can see them go back and

forth all the time, from Earth to the outer planets and back."

"How long has it been since the last one passed?" the alien asked.

Unaccountably, George Harmon felt sudden prickles of fear go through him. "You have no right to ask me these questions. You are the intruder. I should—"

"How long has it been?" the alien insisted.

Despite himself, he thought: When? When did the last spaceship pass? What difference did it make? None. None at all. But when? When was it? A month? Six months? He didn't know. He should know, though, for he had a machine's memory. A year? Two? Time was meaningless out here. When did the last spaceship pass? When?

"I don't know," he said. "I don't know, I don't know, I don't know."

He heard a faint mechanical click as a connection broke, and suddenly it made no difference that he didn't know.

"You have no purpose here," the alien said slowly. "I am going to destroy you."

Calmer, George Harmon searched about for a weapon. But there were no weapons inside, none at all. His only moving parts were small mechanical arms that could move small parts of machinery, and those were in the room where his body lay encased in its cylinder of liquid. Mechanical arms, he thought, having a giant's strength; they could also be

used to destroy. It would be risky, but—

"I am weary," he thought aloud to the creature. "My life-essence is in the hub of the station."

The alien said nothing to this, but it made its way forward, down the slim metal corridors between girders and wires. George watched it move cautiously toward the room that housed his body. Testily, he flexed the metal muscles of the four giant arms surrounding the body. He would have to work fast, before the alien could act against him. A swift blow would knock the protecting box from its arms, two of his mechanical arms would hold the alien tight, while his other two would unscrew the headpiece from the alien's spacesuit. Then he would let the air out of the station.

Grimly, George Harmon smiled to himself. It would be his only chance. If the alien got in control of the central room, all was lost. He would never see green Earth again. Before long they would come for him. Perhaps it was a matter of days. He had to win this.

He watched the alien make its way down the last corridor, saw it pause briefly outside the door, then slide it aside, box extended, and enter.

Quickly, he swung his arms into action, bringing them out in a lightning sweep that knocked the box bouncing metallically onto the floor where it erupted sparks and then



died. The alien stood stunned for a brief moment. In that moment George Harmon shot out with two arms and took hold of the alien.

"Don't!" a voice cried in his mind. "My mission is friendly. I mean no harm."

George Harmon laughed to himself. His other two arms pulled at the headpiece. It twisted awkwardly, came loose.

"Don't!" the voice cried again. "The atmosphere in here, it's—"

"Not nearly as bad as it will be," he completed. "I'm opening the airlock." He laughed again.

He twisted off the helmet and threw it aside. Even as he did this, another thought was impinging upon the mechanism that opened the airlock to space.

Then he stopped, and the thought went uncompleted. The airlock stayed shut. He stared, unbelieving, at the creature in his mechanical arms, at the long golden hair flowing behind an exquisite feminine face, at the figure that suddenly seemed soft and rounded in the bulky spacesuit. In his surprise, he dropped her to the floor, where she lay gasping in the musty air.

Remembering, he closed the door to the room and activated the oxygen mechanism, wondering at the same time if she breathed that or something else. He stared at her in sudden concern, her threat of destroying him gone before other more urgent thoughts that tumbled over

themselves in their haste to become known. How could this be? he wondered. He hadn't seen a girl in ten years now. Was it ten years? Somehow it seemed longer, but then he could have no conception of time out here. Still, she was a female, as female as any Earth might produce. A slight Asiatic tilt to the eyes, perhaps, a trifle pointing of the ears, but unmistakably she was human.

The thought struck him a sledgehammer blow. A humanoid from some alien culture. Earth would want to know of this. It would give him a chance to contact someone down there, perhaps even to get some hint of what year it was. He opened the radio circuit eagerly, waited with renewed impatience for the answering signal. None came. He tried again and again and again. Then he remembered the box on the floor and reached out one of his metal arms and smashed it. But still the radio refused to work.

"It's no use," she said wearily. She sat up, still dazed, holding her head. "They're all gone, all of them. No one will answer."

He turned on her angrily. "What do you mean, gone?" he demanded. "Who's gone? Who?" He reached out as though to shake the information from her.

She didn't move. "Earth is gone," she said, unafraid. "Earth is gone and Earthlings no more. You have no purpose here."

"What do you know of it?" he

said contemptuously. "Earth is down there, green and full of life, and before long I'll be down there on it myself."

"You are a human," she said, "as I thought." She indicated the body in the transparent tube. "And this is your body. I remember reading about things like this, but not until now did I believe it. It's horrible. How long have you been here?"

"Ten years," he answered proudly. He didn't mind answering, for he had the upper hand. "When my term is up, they will come and take my body back to Earth and restore it to life."

She shook her head. "No one will come," she said wearily. "There is no one on Earth, no one at all."

"That's a lie." He could feel himself trembling, almost physically.

"Earth is a cinder," she said, calmly. "They fought among themselves, using atomic weapons. Chain reactions started. The air burst into flame. A few of them, my ancestors, flew from the solar system and found peace on another star."

"Ancestors?" he said, puzzled. Confidence returned. "It can't be true. It's been only ten years. Ten years. All that couldn't have happened."

She looked up at his still body, pity in her eyes. She said slowly, "Earth has been abandoned for the past thousand years!"

"I don't believe it," he said. "You're lying, trying to get me to

release you. Well, I won't. We'll wait and prove I'm right."

"You've been waiting for a thousand years without realizing it, and no one has come for you," she said. "You can wait for a thousand more, and a thousand after that, and still no one will come. Earth is dead!"

"No," he cried, trying to thrust the thought from his mind. "It's not true."

"Find out for yourself," she suggested. "Go down to Earth, see if what I say is not true."

"I can't. I can't leave this orbit. My function is as a space station, not a space ship. I have only enough power to swerve course slightly."

"My ship can do it then," she said. "I can leave the grapplers on and tow you to Earth."

He laughed mockingly. "Once aboard your ship you could destroy me, as you threatened. At the least, you could escape. No, that's one thing that won't happen. We'll wait for them to come and get me."

"You're a fool!" she cried angrily. "You'll wait for all eternity, and no one will come. Listen to me. I can take you back to our world. Your body is young yet, and you can start over again. It's a nice world, the people are friendly—"

He hesitated, his mind a strange chaos before her compelling words, and then a deep click in the bowels of the machinery around him testified to the severing of an unwholesome connection. "No," he said. She

was not going to trick him. Not now, when in a matter of days they might come for him. With Earth nearly in his grasp, he was not going to give up so easily.

She slumped, dejected, on the metal floor and regarded him with pitying eyes. He turned his attention from her and swung the giant telescope into position to look at Earth. The image leaped into view. It was not nearly as green as he had remembered it, and the great oceans seemed to cover only a small portion of the planet. But it was Earth, good old Earth, just the same, and before long he would be down there, a human again after ten years out in space. The thought was exhilarating. And this creature wanted to seduce him from it!

At the thought of her, he turned his attention inward. Helmet in hand, she had managed to pry open the door. Automatically he swung his tentacles, caught her in a crushing grip that contorted her pretty features into something unpretty. He closed his ears to the scream and then his eyes. After a while he looked. Blood dripped from her still body onto the metal floor in a widening pool. Disgusted, he dropped the body. He hadn't meant to do it, he hadn't meant to. But with such a short time left—

He turned away and contemplated the silent universe outside. Well, no matter; when they came for him they would take care of that.

He turned his attention to Earth again, dreaming of the days he would spend down there, pleasant days, with all this behind him. He watched Earth trace its ceaseless pattern about the sun, and he began counting its revolutions once more, one, two, three, four, five, and then he lost interest as something troubled him vaguely and the machinery went click and he felt at peace. He waited.

After a while, he looked in on the body of the alien, and he found only a skeleton there in a space suit, with long once-golden hair stringing like glistening spiderwebs from the skull. Mentally he grimaced, remembering how she had looked. Yet he felt satisfied now, for she surely could not have been a descendant of Earthlings, as she had claimed; her body could not have been destroyed in the few minutes that had elapsed, if she had been of Earth. Hardly any time at all had gone by. His mind accepted the rationalization and filed it for future reference.

George Harmon waited. He waited and dreamed of Earth while that planet spun on through the eternal night beneath him. The sun turned orange and then became the red staring eye of a man ready to die, and still he waited.

He waited patiently, impatiently, thinking, not thinking, dreaming many dreams, while around him the universe went on.

And no one came. \* \* \*

# The ENCHANTED

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY ASLEEP MEANT PAIN TO ONE MAN,



# PRINCESS

by Jack Vance

**WEALTH TO ANOTHER. AWAKE, SHE BROUGHT DEATH.**

JAMES AIKEN recognized the man at the reception desk as Victor Martinon, former producer at Pageant. Martinon had been fired in the recent retrenchment, and the headlines in *Variety* sent goose-flesh along every back in the industry. If flamboyant, money-making Martinon went, who was safe?

Aiken approached the desk, puzzled by Martinon's presence at the Krebs Children's Clinic. A versatile lover, Martinon never stayed married long enough to breed children. If Martinon were here on the same errand as his own—well, that was a different matter. Aiken felt a sharpening of interest.

"Hello, Martinon."

"Hi," said Martinon, neither knowing Aiken's identity nor caring.

"I worked on *Clair de Lune* with you—built the Dreamboat sequence."

*Clair de Lune* was Martinon's next to last picture.

"Oh, yes. Quite an effort. Still with Pageant?"

"I'm in my own lab now. Doing special effects for TV."

"A man's got to eat," said Martinon, implying that Aiken now could sink no further.

Aiken's mouth quivered, reflecting mingled emotions. "Keep me in mind, if you ever get back in pictures."

"Yeah. Sure will."

Aiken had never liked Martinon anyway. Martinon was big and broad, about forty, with silver hair pomaded and brushed till it glittered. His eyes were vaguely owlish—large, dark, surrounded by fine wrinkles; his mustache was cat-like; he wore excellent clothes. Aiken had no mustache; he was wiry and dark. He walked with a slight limp because of a Korean bullet, and so looked older than his twenty-five years. Martinon was suave and smelled of heather; Aiken was abrupt, angular and smelled of nothing much in particular.

Aiken spoke to the nurse behind the desk. "My sister has a little boy here. Bunny Tedrow."

"Oh, yes, Bunny. Nice little boy."

"She came to visit him yesterday, and told me about the film you were

showing. I'd like to see it. If I may, of course."

The nurse looked sidewise at Martinon. "I don't really see any objection. I suppose you'd better speak to Dr. Krebius. Or if Mr. Martinon says it's all right—."

"Oh," Aiken looked at Martinon. "Some of your stuff?"

Martinon nodded. "In a way. The films are, well, experimental. I'm not sure we want anyone checking them just yet."

"Here's Dr. Krebius," said the nurse placidly, and Martinon frowned.

Dr. Krebius was stocky, red-faced, forthright. His hair was whiter than Martinon's and rose from his scalp like a whisk-broom. He wore a white smock, and gave off a faint odor of clean laundry and iodoform.

The nurse said, "This gentleman heard about the films; he wants to see them."

"Ah," Dr. Krebius looked at Aiken with eyes like little blue ball-bearings. "The little stories." He spoke in a heavy accent, gruff and deep in his throat. "You are who?"

"My name is James Aiken. My sister saw the films yesterday and told me about them."

"Ah ha," growled Krebius, turning to Martinon as if he would clap him on the back. "Maybe we charge admission, hey? Make money for the hospital!"

Martinon said in a measured voice, "Aiken here works in a film

laboratory. His interest is professional."

"Sure! What of it? Let him look! He does no harm!"

Martinon shrugged, moved off down the hall.

Krebius turned back to Aiken. "We show not much. Just a few little stories to please the children." He glanced at his wristwatch. "In six minutes, at two o'clock precisely. That is the way we work here, precise on the second. That way we cure the sick little legs, the blind eyes."

"Oh," said Aiken. "Blind children too?"

"My specialty! You know of the Krebius Klinik in Leipzig?"

Aiken shook his head. "Sorry."

"For ten years we do tremendous work. Far ahead of what you do here. Why? There is more to do, we must be bold!" He tapped Aiken on the chest with a hard forefinger. "Two years ago I give up my wonderful hospital. There is no living with the Communists. They order me to make lenses, soldiers to see better down the guns. My work is to heal the eyes, not putting them out. I come here."

"I see your point," said Aiken. He hesitated. Martinon's attitude had given him the uncomfortable sense of interloping.

Krebius looked at him under bristly eyebrows.

"Incidentally," said Aiken, "as Martinon says, I'm in the special effects business. Part of my work is

keeping up with what's going on."

"Of course. Why not? I have no interest in the film; it is not mine. Look as you please. Martinon is the cautious one. Fear is caution. I have no fear. I am cautious only with the tools of my work. Then!" He held up his blunt hands. "I am like a vise. The eye is a delicate organ!"

He bowed, walked off down the corridor. Aiken and the nurse watched him go. Aiken, grinning a little, looked at the nurse, who was grinning too.

"You should see him when he's excited. And then—well! I was raised on a farm. The old kitchen range used to get red hot. When water spilled on it. . ."

"I'm a farm boy myself," said Aiken.

"That's Dr. Krebius. You'd better go. He wasn't fooling. We work by the split-second around here. Right down the end of the hall, that's the ward for today's films."

Aiken walked down the corridor, pushed through the swinging door into a large room with curtained windows. Crippled children occupied beds along the walls, wheelchairs down the center of the room. Aiken looked around for Bunny, but saw him nowhere. A table near the door supported a sixteen millimeter projector; on the far wall a screen hung. Martinon stood by the projector threading in the film. He nodded curtly at Aiken.

The clock on the wall read half

a minute to two. Martinon flicked on the projector's lamp and motor, focussed the image. A nurse went to sit under the screen with a big red book.

The minute hand touched two.  
Two P.M.

"Today," said the nurse, "we watch another chapter from the life of Ulysses. Last time, you'll remember, they were trapped by a terrible one-eyed giant called Polyphemus, on the island that we call Sicily today. Polyphemus is a horrible creature that's been eating up the Greeks." A delighted shudder and buzz ran around the room. "Today we find Ulysses and his men plotting an escape." She nodded. The lights went out. Martinon started the projector.

There was a chattering sound. The white rectangle on the screen quivered, shook. Martinon switched off the projector. The lights went on. Martinon bent over the projector with a worried frown. He banged it with his knuckles, shook it, tried the switch again. The same chatter. He looked up, shook his head despondently. "Don't think we're going to make it today."

"Aw," sighed the children.

Aiken went over to the projector. "What's the trouble?"

"It's been coming on a long time," said Martinon. "Something in the sprockets. I'll have to take it to the repairman."

"Let me take a look. I've got the

same model; I know it inside out."

"Oh, don't bother," said Martinon, but Aiken was already investigating the mechanism. He opened a blade of his pocket knife, worked ten seconds. "She'll go now. The screw holding the sprocket to the drive gear was loose."

"Much obliged," muttered Martinon.

Aiken took his seat. Martinon caught the nurse's eye. She bent over the book, began to read aloud. The lights went out.

*The Odyssey!* Aiken was looking into a vast cave, dim-lit by firelight. Hoary walls rose to fade into high murk. Off to one side lay a great manlike hulk. At his back a dozen men worked feverishly, and in the vast smoky volume of the cavern they were miniatures, manikins. They held a great pointed pole into the flames, and the red firelight played and danced on their sweating bodies.

The camera drew closer. The features of the men became visible— young, clean-limbed warriors moving with passionate determination, heroic despair. Ulysses stood forth, a man with a face of the Sistine Jehovah. He signalled. The warriors heaved the spear to their shoulders. Crouching under the weight, they ran forward against the face half-seen in the dimness.

It was a lax, idiotic face, with one eye in the middle of the forehead. The camera drew away showing the

length of Polyphemus' body. The Greeks came running with the flaming pike; the eye snapped open, stared in wonder, and the pike bored into the center—deep, deep, deep.

Polyphemus jerked his head, the spear flung up, the Greeks scuttled into the shadows, disappeared. Polyphemus tore in agony at his face, wrenched loose the spear. He lunged around the cave, groping with one hand, clasping his bloody face with the other.

The camera went to the Greeks pressing back against the walls. The squat, bulging legs tramped past them. A great hand swept close, scraped, grabbed. The Greeks held their breaths, and the sweat gleamed on their chests.

Polyphemus stumbled away, into the fire; the logs scattered, embers flew. Polyphemus bellowed in frustration.

The camera shifted to the Greeks, tying themselves under monster sheep.

Polyphemus stood at the mouth of the cave. He pushed the great barrier rock aside and, straddling the opening, felt of the back of each sheep as it passed between his legs.

The Greeks ran down to the golden beach, launched their galley over the wine-dark sea. They hoisted the sail and the wind drove them off-shore.

Polyphemus came down to the beach. He picked up a boulder, flung it. Slow through the air it flew,



slanting down toward the Greeks. It crashed into the sea, and the galley was tossed high on a fountain of water and bright white foam. Polyphemus stooped for another boulder. The scene faded.

"And that's all for today," said the nurse.

The children sighed in disappointment, began to chatter.

Martinon looked at Aiken with a peculiar sidelong grin. "What do you think?"

"Not bad," said Aiken. "Not bad at all. A little rough in spots. You could use better research. That wasn't any Greek galley—more like a Viking longboat."

Martinon nodded carelessly. "It's not my film; I'm on the outside looking in. But I agree with you. All brains and no technique, like a lot of this *avant garde* stuff."

"I don't recognize any of the actors. Who made it?"

"Merlin Studios."

"Never heard of them."

"They've just organized. One of my friends is involved. He asked me to show the film to some kids, get the reaction."

"They like it," said Aiken.

Martinon shrugged. "Kids are easy to please."

Aiken turned to go. "So long, and thanks."

"Don't mention it."

In the hall, Aiken met Dr. Krebius, standing with a pretty blonde girl of sixteen or seventeen. Krebius

gave him a genial salute. "And the film, you liked it?"

"Very much," said Aiken. "But I'm puzzled."

"Ah ha," said Krebius with a foxy wink at the girl. "The little secrets that we must keep."

"Secrets?" she murmured. "What secrets?"

"I forget," said Krebius. "You know none of the secrets."

Aiken looked intently at the girl, glanced quickly at the doctor, and Krebius nodded. "This is little Carol Bannister. She's blind."

"That's too bad," said Aiken. Her eyes turned in his direction. They were a wide, deep Dutch blue, mild and tranquil. He saw that she might be a year or two older than he had first imagined.

Krebius stroked her silken-blond head as he might pat a spaniel. "It's a pity when lovely young girls can't see to look and flirt and watch the boys' hearts go bumping. But with Carol—well, we work and we hope, and who knows? Someday she may see as well as you or I."

"I sure hope so," said Aiken.

"Thank you," the girl said softly, and Aiken took his leave.

In an unaccountably gloomy mood, he returned to his lab and found himself unable to work. For an hour he sat musing and smoking, then, on a sudden inspiration, called a friend, who was legman for a famous Hollywood columnist.

"Hello, Larry. This is Aiken."

"What's on the fire?"

"I want some dope on Merlin Studios. Got any?"

"Nothing. Never heard of 'em. What do they do?"

Aiken felt like dropping the whole thing. "Oh, they've made a few snatches of film. Fairy tales, things like that."

"Any good?"

Aiken thought back over the film, and his wonder revived. "Yeah," he said. "Very good. In fact—magnificent."

"You don't say. Merlin Studios?"

"Right. And I think—just think, mind you—that Victor Martinon is in on it."

"Martinon, eh? I'll ask Fidelia." Fidelia was Larry's boss. "She might know. If it's a tip, thanks."

"Not at all."

An hour later Larry called back. "I've learned three things. First, nobody in the trade knows anything about Merlin Studios. It's a vacuum. Second, Vic Martinon's been doing some fancy finagling, and he has been heard to use the words 'Merlin Studios'. Third, they're arranging a sneak preview tonight."

"Tonight? Where?"

"Garden City Theater, Pomona."

"Okay, Larry. Thanks."

Aiken watched five minutes of feature film, which was immediately followed by a slide reading:

*Please do not leave the theater.*

*You are about to witness a*

*SNEAK PREVIEW*

*Your comments will be appreciated.*

The slide dissolved into a title: a montage of colored letters on a silver-green background:

VASILISSA THE  
ENCHANTED PRINCESS.

*A fantasy based on an ancient  
Russian fairy tale.*

THE MERLIN STUDIOS.

The silver-green background dissolved into orange; bold gray letters read: *Produced by Victor Martinon.*

There were no further credits. The orange dissolved into a blur of gray mist, with wandering hints of pink and green.

A voice spoke. "We go far away and long ago—to old Russia where once upon a time a young woodcutter named Ivan, returning from the woods, found a dove lying under a tree. The dove had a broken wing, and looked at Ivan so sorrowfully that he took pity on it . . ."

The mist broke open, into the world of fairyland, a landscape swimming in a radiance, richness, color. It was real and it was unreal, a land everyone hoped for but knew never could be. There was a forest of antique trees, banks of ferns with the sun shining through the leaves, moist white flowers, beds of violets. The foliage was brown, gold, rust, lime and dark green, and down through the leaves came shafts of sunshine. Beyond the forest was a green meadow sprinkled with dai-

sies, buttercups, cowslips, cornflowers; and far away down the valley the dark wooden gables of a village, the onion dome of a church could be seen.

The story proceeded, narrated by the voice. "Ivan nursed the dove back to health, and received a malachite casket for a reward. When he opened the casket a magnificent palace appeared on the meadow, surrounded by beautiful gardens, terraces of ivory, statues of jade and jet and cinnabar.

"The Czar of the Sea, riding past, saw the palace. Angry at Ivan's presumption he set Ivan impossible tasks—cutting down a forest overnight, building a flying ship, breaking an iron stallion to the saddle.

"The dove came to aid Ivan. She was Vasillissa, a beautiful maiden with long honey-blond hair . . ."

The fable vaulted from miracle to miracle, through battles, sorcery, quests to the end of the earth, the final defeat of the Czar.

There was no sound from the audience. Every eye stared as if seeing the most precious part of their lives. The landscapes glowed with marvelous light: pink, blue, black, gold. The scenes were rich with imagery; real with the truth of poetry. The Czar, a great swarthy man, wore a scarlet robe and over this a black iron corselet embossed with jade. Chumichka, his steward, hopped around on malformed legs, glaring wildly from a pallid sidelong face.

The story swarmed with monsters and creatures of fable: griffins, hedge-hounds, fish with legs, fiery birds.

And Vasillissa! When Aiken saw Vasillissa, he muttered and stirred in his seat. Vasillissa was a beautiful golden-haired girl, swift as dandelion fluff, gay as any of the flowers. Vasillissa was as much a thing of magic as Ivan's wonderful palace. Like the fairy landscapes, she awakened a yearning that could never be satisfied. In one scene she came down to the river to catch a witch who had taken the form of a carp. The pool was like bottle-glass, shadowed by black-green poplars. Vasillissa stood silent, looking over the water. The carp jumped up in a flurry of silver spray; she turned her head so suddenly that the blonde hair swung out to the side.

"I must be completely mad," said Aiken to himself.

Vasillissa and Ivan finally escaped the raging Czar. "And they lived happily ever after, in the palace by the Doroghény Woods," said the voice. And the picture ended.

Aiken drew a great breath. He joined the applause of the audience, rose to his feet, drove back to his apartment at breakneck pace.

For several hours he lay awake thinking. Magic Vasillissa! Today he had seen her as a blind girl, with silky blonde hair; slight, thoughtful, rather shy. Carol Bannister—Vasillissa. She was and she wasn't. Carol

was blind. Vasillissa had bright blue eyes and could see very well indeed. What a strange situation, thought Aiken, and lay tossing and dozing and dreaming and thinking.

James Aiken was hardly a handsome man, although he had an indefinable flair, the concentration of character that equals color. His mouth drooped at a harsh saturnine angle; he was thin and angular; he walked with a limp. He smoked and drank a good deal; he had few friends, and made no great play for women. He was clever, imaginative, quick with his hands, and the Aiken Special Effects Laboratory was doing good business. He aroused no great loyalty from his employees. They thought him cynical and morose. But a cynic is a disappointed idealist; and James Aiken was as tender, wistful an idealist as could be found in all Los Angeles.

Vasillissa the Enchanted Princess!

He brooded about Carol Bannister. She had not acted Vasillissa, she *was* Vasillissa! And the magic longing rose in his throat like a sour taste, and he knew nothing else in life was as important.

At quarter of ten next morning he drove north on Arroyo Seco Boulevard, up winding Lomita Way to the Krebius Children's Clinic.

At the desk he gave his name, asked to speak to Dr. Krebius, and after a ten minute wait was ushered into an austere office.

Krebius rose to his feet, bowed stiffly. "Yes, Mr. Aiken." No longer the bluff and genial doctor of yesterday, he seemed stubborn and suspicious.

Aiken asked, "May I sit down?"

"Certainly." Krebius lowered himself into his own chair, erect as a post. "What do you wish?"

"I'd like to talk to you about Carol Bannister."

Krebius raised his eyebrows inquiringly, as if the choice of topic had surprised him. "Very well."

"Has she ever done any acting? In the movies?"

"Carol?" Krebius looked puzzled. "No. Never. I have known her many years. My sister is married to the cousin of her father. She has done no acting. Perhaps you are thinking of her mother. Marya Leone."

"Marya Leone? Carol's mother?"

Krebius indulged himself in a wintry smile. "Yes."

"I feel even sorrier for Carol." Marya Leone, a long-faded soubrette, was known along Sunset Strip as a confirmed and unregenerate alcoholic. A fragment of long-dead gossip rose into his mind. "One of her husbands killed himself."

"That was Carol's father. Four years ago. That very night Carol lost her vision. Her life has been clouded by great tragedy."

Krebius pushed himself back in his chair, his white eyebrows came lower down over his hard blue eyes.

Aiken said in a conciliatory voice,

"Do you think there's a connection? Between the blindness and the suicide? Shock perhaps? Somewhere I've heard of things like that."

Krebius spread his hands in a non-committal gesture. "Who knows? They were high in the mountains, in a lodge that Marya Leone at that time still owned. Carol was fourteen. A thunderstorm came at night, bringing evil emotions. There was quarrelling. Howard Bannister shot himself, and in the next room a bolt of lightning struck through the window at little Carol. She has seen nothing since."

"Hysterical blindness. That's the word I was thinking of. Could she be suffering from that?"

Krebius made the same non-committal gesture. Aiken felt in him a lessening of suspicion and hostility. "Perhaps. But I think not. The optic nerve no longer functions correctly, although in many ways it reacts like perfectly healthy tissue. Carol is victim to a unique disability. The cause, who knows? Glare? Electricity? Shock? Terror? In the absence of precedent, I must strike out for myself. I attempt to stimulate the nerve; I have devised special equipment. I love her as my own child." Krebius leaned forward, pounded the desk for emphasis.

"What are her chances of seeing again?"

Krebius leaned back in his chair, looked away. "I do not know. I think she will see—sometime."

"Your treatments are helping her?"

"I believe and trust so."

"One more question, Doctor. How does Victor Martinon fit into the picture?"

Krebius became subtly uncomfortable. "He is her mother's friend. In fact—," His voice trailed off. "In fact it is said at one time—."

Aiken nodded. "I see. But why—"

Krebius interrupted him. "Victor is helping me. He is interested in therapy."

"Victor Martinon?" Aiken laughed in such sardonic disbelief that Krebius flushed. "I can easily see Martinon playing in a Salvation Army Band."

"Nevertheless," said Krebius, "he assists me in giving treatments."

"To Carol?"

"Yes. To Carol." Krebius was once again stubborn and hostile. His eyes glared, his white eyebrows bristled, his chin thrust out. In an icy voice he asked, "May I ask your interest in Carol?"

Aiken had been expecting the question, but had no easy answer ready. He fidgeted uncomfortably. "I'd rather not answer that question . . . You can think of it as a romantic interest."

Krebius' busy eyebrows rose in surprise. "Romance? Little Carol? A child yet?"

"Perhaps you don't know her as well as you think you do."

"Perhaps not," muttered Krebius

deep in thought. "Perhaps not. The little ones grow up so fast."

"Incidentally," Aiken asked, "does Carol have any sisters? Or cousin who looks like her?"

"No. Nothing. No one."

Aiken said no more. He rose to his feet. "I won't take up your time, Doctor. But I'd like to talk to Carol, if I may."

Krebius stared up truculently as if he might refuse, then shrugged and grunted. "I have no objections. She must not leave the hospital. She is in my care."

"Thank you." Aiken left the office, went to the reception desk. Martinon was just coming in through the main entrance. At the sight of Aiken his pace slackened.

"Hello, Aiken. What are you doing here?"

"I might ask the same of you."

"I have business here."

"So have I." Aiken turned to the nurse. "I'd like to speak to Carol Bannister. Dr. Krebius gave me permission."

"I'll ring for her. You can wait in the reception room."

"Thanks." Aiken nodded to Martinon, went into the reception room which opened off the lobby, across from Krebius' office.

Martinon looked after him, turned, walked into Krebius' office without knocking.

Time passed. Aiken sat on the edge of his chair, his hands moist. He was extremely nervous, and cor-

respondingly annoyed at himself. Who would come through the door? Carol Bannister? Vasillissa? Was he confused, mistaken, making a fool of himself? The minutes passed, and Aiken could no longer sit still. He rose to his feet, moved around the room. Through the open door he saw Martinon come into the lobby followed by Dr. Krebius. Martinon was pale and glittering-eyed. Krebius looked surly. They marched up the corridor, neither speaking to the other, and disappeared into a room next to Krebius' office, with *Laboratory* painted on the door.

The corridor was now empty. Aiken went back to the couch, forced himself to sit quietly.

A nurse appeared in the doorway. "Mr. Aiken?" she asked briskly.

"Yes." He rose to his feet.

Carol came into the doorway, felt her way past the jamb. In her white blouse and gray flannel skirt she looked like a college freshman; her honey-colored hair was brushed till it shone. She seemed slighter and more fragile than Aiken had remembered, but of course his recollection was colored by the image of Vasillissa, agile, vital, reckless.

She looked uncertainly in Aiken's direction, with wide, blank, Delft-blue eyes.

"Hello," said Aiken in a voice that was not quite his own.

"Hello." She was puzzled.

Aiken took her arm, led her to the couch. The nurse nodded briefly at

Aiken, disappeared. "My name is James Aiken. I spoke to you in the hall yesterday."

"Oh, yes. I remember now."

Aiken was studying her face. Was this Carol? Or Vasillissa? And if she were Vasillissa, how did Carol see? He made up his mind. It was definite. There was something in the poise of the head, the slant of the jaw that was unmistakable. This was Vasillissa. But she lived in a new country, in a new time, unable to use her magic. The dove with the broken wing.

She moved restlessly. Aiken hastily said, "I suppose you're wondering what I want."

She laughed. "I'm glad you came. I get lonesome."

"Dr. Krebius tells me you lost your sight in a lightning storm—"

Her face went instantly blank and cold. He had said the wrong thing.

"He says that it's very likely you'll see again."

"Yes."

"These treatments—do they do you any good?"

"You mean, the Opticon?"

"If that's what they call it."

"Well, up to three or four months ago I thought I saw the colors. You know, little flashes. But I don't see them any more."

"How long has Martinon been working with you?"

"Oh, about that long. He works differently from Doctor Krebius."

"How?"

"Oh," she shrugged. "He doesn't do very much. Except read to me."

Aiken was puzzled. "What good does that do?"

"I don't know. I guess it keeps me amused while the machine is turned on."

"Do you know that Martinon used to be a motion picture producer?"

"I know he used to work in the movies. He's never told me exactly what he did."

"How long have you known him?"

"Not very long. He says he used to know Mother. Mother was in the movies."

"Yes, I know. Marya Leone."

"She's quite a drunk now," Carol said in an even voice which might or might not conceal deep feeling. She turned her blank eyes toward him. "May I feel your face?"

"Certainly."

Her fingertips felt his hair, forehead, brushed over his eye sockets, nose, mouth, chin. She made no comment.

"Well?" said Aiken.

"Are you a detective or something like that?"

"I'm a frustrated artist."

"Oh. You're asking so many questions."

"Do you mind? I've got a lot more."

"No. If you'll answer some for me first."

"Go ahead. Ask."

She hesitated. "Well, why did you come to see me?"

Aiken smiled faintly. "I saw a movie last night, called *Vasillissa the Enchanted Princess*."

"Oh? The fairy tale? I know that one very well. About Ivan and the wicked Czar of the Sea."

"In this movie Vasillissa was a very beautiful girl. She had long silken hair like yours. She had blue eyes like yours. In fact—" Aiken hesitated over the fateful phrase—"in fact, she was you."

"Me?"

"Yes. You. Carol Bannister."

Carol laughed. "You flatter me very much. I've never acted, not even in grammar school. Watching Mother emote killed any urge I had."

"But it *was* you."

"It couldn't be!" She was smiling, half-worried, half-amused.

"The film was produced by Victor Martinon; Martinon's been hanging around here. You live here. The coincidence is too great. There's something fishy going on."

Carol was silent. She was thinking. A queer look came over her face.

"Yesterday I saw another film," said Aiken. "Part of *The Odyssey*."

"*The Odyssey*... Victor read *The Odyssey* to me. Also *The Enchanted Princess*."

"This is very strange," said Aiken.

"Yes. And these last few days..." She was blushing, blushing pink scarlet.

"What's the matter?"

"He's been saying some rather awful things. Asking questions."

Aiken felt the skin at the back of his neck slowly going taut. Carol turned her head, as if she could actually see him, swiftly put her hand up, touched his face. "Why, you're angry!"

"Yes, I'm angry."

"But why?" She was puzzled.

The words spilled out of Aiken's mouth. "You may or may not understand. I saw this picture last night. I saw Vasillissa—this may seem very strange to you—but everything she did, every angle of her head, every motion of her head—they meant something to me. I sound like a high school boy, but I fell in love with Vasillissa. And I come here and see you."

"But I'm not Vasillissa," she said.

"Yes, you are. You're Vasillissa under a spell. Vasillissa frozen in a block of ice. I want to help you, to make you the free Vasillissa again."

Carol laughed. "You're Ivan."

"At heart," said Aiken, "I'm Ivan."

She reached up again, touched his face, and the touch had a different texture. It was less impersonal. "You don't feel like Ivan."

"I don't look like Ivan."

A figure loomed in the door. Carol dropped her hand, turned her head.

"Mr. Aiken," said Krebius, "I would much appreciate a word with you in my office."



Aiken slowly rose. "Just one minute, Doctor."

"Now, if you don't mind."

"Very well." Aiken turned to Carol, but she had stood up. She was holding his arm.

"Doctor," she said, "does what you want to talk about concern me?"

"Yes, my child."

"I'm not a child, Dr. Krebius. If it concerns me, I want to be with you."

He looked at her in bewilderment.

"But Carol, this will be men's talk."

"If it concerns me, I want to know."

Aiken asked, "Are you planning to warn me off? If you are, you can save your breath."

"Come with me!" barked Krebius. He turned, stamped across the lobby to his office, flung the door open.

Aiken, with Carol holding to his arm, started to walk through; Krebius put out his arm to bar Carol. "To your room, child!"

"You'll talk to us both, Doctor," Aiken said in a low voice. "And you'll tell us both the truth, or I'll go to the Board of Health and demand an investigation! I'll charge you with malpractice."

Krebius' arm dropped like a wet sack. "You threaten me! I have nothing to hide! My reputation is of the utmost value!"

"Then why do you allow Martinon to use Carol as he has?"

Krebius became stern and stiff. "You speak of matters you know nothing of."

Carol said, "I know nothing about them either."

"Come in, then," said Krebius. "Both of you." He turned, stopped short, staring at his desk. Four glossy 8 x 10 photographs were lying face up. Krebius stumped hastily across the room, snatched the photographs, tried to stuff them under the blotter. His hands were shaking; one photograph fell to the floor. Aiken inspected it quizzically, lit a cigarette. Krebius grabbed up the photograph, furiously pushed it under the blotter with the others.

"It's not true," he said hoarsely. "It's a fraud! A fake!" He jumped to his feet, banged his fist on the desk. "It's nonsense of the worst sort!"

"Okay," said Aiken. "I believe you."

Krebius sat down, breathing heavily.

"Tell me," said Aiken, "is Martinon blackmailing you with these pictures?"

Krebius looked at him dully.

"They're nothing to worry about. If he showed them to anybody, he'd get in worse trouble than you would."

Krebius shook his head. "I want you to leave this hospital, Mr. Aiken," he croaked. "Never come back."

"Doctor, tell us the truth. How did Martinon make those pictures? Somehow, he's been photographing Carol's thoughts."

"My thoughts?" Carol drew a deep breath. "*Photographing my thoughts?*" She considered a minute or two. "Oh, golly!" She hid her face in her hands.

Krebius was leaning forward on his desk, hands clenched in his hair. "Yes," he muttered. "May God forgive me."

"But, Doctor!" cried Carol.

Krebius waved his hand. "I found it out when I first tried the Opticon. I noticed images, very faint. I was amazed."

"'Amazed' is no word for the way I feel," said Carol.

"I built this machine for you alone. You had a unique handicap—all the equipment for sight, but no vision. The Opticon was to stimulate the optic nerve. I could fire bursts of colored light into your retina, observe results through a microscope. I was astonished to find images on your retina."

"But why didn't you tell me?" Carol demanded.

"You would become self-conscious. Your thoughts would not flow freely. And it was only in you, one person in all the world, in whom I could see these marvels." Dr. Krebius sat back in his chair. "We knew vision always as going one way. Light strikes the retina, the rods and cones send little electric messages to the visual center. In Carol the one way is cut off. But in her there is this reversible process. The energy comes down the optic nerve from

the brain, it forms an image on the retina.

"I took some photographs. They were scientific curiosities. I went to your mother's house to ask for money. She pays me nothing. I am not wealthy. I met Victor, and we drank whiskey." Krebius narrowed his eyes. "I showed him the photographs. He wanted to experiment. I saw no great harm. There might be money for all of us. For you, Carol, for you most of all. I said yes, but the treatments must continue; no compromise with the cure!"

"But actually you don't know what Victor's been doing?"

"No. I thought there was no need."

"He hasn't been giving any treatments."

Krebius sat silently.

"He doesn't want Carol to see," said Aiken. "She's a gold mine for Victor."

"Yes, yes. I see this now."

"Also, she gave him a club over you." Aiken turned to Carol. "Did Victor ever ask you about Doctor Krebius?"

Carol's face was pink with embarrassment. "He asked some awful questions. I couldn't help but think about what he was saying."

"Carol has a strong visual imagination," said Krebius mournfully. "It's not her fault. But these pictures . . ."

"They'd never stand up in court."

"No, but my reputation!"

Aiken said nothing.

Krebius muttered, "I've been a fool, a wicked fool. How may I expiate my weakness?" He rose, lurched over to Carol. "My dear girl," he faltered. "I will cure you. You will see again. You have a good retina, you have a healthy optic nerve. Stimulation! We will make you see!" And he said humbly, "If only you will forgive me!"

Carol said something in a muffled voice. Her face was pinched, constricted. She seemed dazed.

Aiken said, "I'd like to call in somebody else for consultation. Doctor Barnett."

"No," said Krebius. "I have forgotten more about eyes than any man in California knows."

"But do you know anything about the brain?"

Krebius was silent for a moment. Then, "You are obsessed with psychology. Today all is psychology—miracles. And good old-fashioned surgery goes out the window."

"But certainly you've seen cases of hysterical blindness," Aiken protested.

Carol said faintly, "I'm not hysterical. I'm just mad."

"In the front lines," said Aiken, "when something terrible happens, sometimes men can't walk, or hear, or see. I've seen it happen."

"I know all this," said Krebius. "In Leipzig I have treated several such cases. Well, we will try." He took a deep breath, took Carol's hands. "My

dear, do you agree to an experiment? It might be unpleasant."

"What for?" she asked in a low voice.

"To help you to see!"

"What will you do?"

"First, a little injection to quiet the brain. To make it easy for you to talk."

"But I don't want to talk," she said in a stony voice.

"Even if it will help you see?"

For a moment a refusal seemed to be on her lips, but she bit it back and said, "Very well. If you think it will help me."

"Hello!" said Victor Martinon from the doorway. He looked from Krebius to Aiken to Carol, and back to Aiken. "You still here, Aiken? Must be wonderful to have time to waste. Let's go, Carol. Time for exercises."

"Not today, Victor," said Krebius.

Martinon raised his handsome eyebrows. "Why not?"

"Today," said Krebius, "we try something different."

"Oh, so?" said Martinon in a tone of mild wonder.

"Come, Carol," said Krebius. "To the Opticon. We will try to photograph the beast that rides your brain."

Carol rose stiffly, walked through the door. Aiken followed. Out in the hall Martinon said, "I'm sorry, Aiken, but I don't think Doctor Krebius wants strangers watching his treatments. Do you, Doctor?"

Krebius said stiffly, "Aiken comes if he likes."

Martinon shrugged. "Just as you like. I won't answer to Carol's mother for the consequences."

Carol said, "Since when has Mother cared two cents one way or the other?"

"She's very fond of you, Carol," Martinon said patiently. "And she's a sick woman."

Carol's face took on a bleak look. "Probably only a hangover."

Aiken said conversationally, "I didn't know you were still thick with Marya Leone."

"I've known her for years," Martinon said with simple dignity. "I gave her her last part—in *They Didn't Know Beans*."

Krebius pushed open the laboratory door. Carol went in, walked directly to a heavy black ophthalmologist's chair, seated herself. Krebius unlocked a cabinet, rolled out a heavy device with two long binocular eye-pieces. "Just one moment," said Krebius, and left the room.

Martinon seated himself in a chair at the far wall, crossed his legs with an expression of patient boredom. "Everybody figures me for a cad, I see."

Aiken said, "I can't speak for anybody else. As for myself—"

Martinon made a careless gesture with his cigarette. "Don't bother. The trouble is, you don't see what I'm trying to accomplish."

"Money?"

Martinon nodded slowly. "Money, of course. But also a new way of making pictures. Somebody's got to start. There's a whole new industry ready to spring to life."

Martinon fell silent.

Aiken patted Carol's hand. "You look scared."

"I am scared. What's going to happen?"

"Nothing very much."

"Do you think I'm crazy? And that's why I can't see?"

"No. But there may be something in your mind that doesn't want to see."

"But I do want to see! If I want to see, why can't I? It doesn't make sense!"

"Theories come and theories go," said Martinon in a tired voice.

After a moment Carol said, "I'm afraid of that Opticon. I'm afraid to think."

Aiken glanced at Martinon, who met his eyes blandly. "I imagine you would be."

"You lack the scientific outlook," said Martinon.

"You lack something too," said Aiken.

Krebius came in with a loaded hypodermic.

"What's that?" Aiken asked.

"Scopolamine."

"The truth drug," said Martinon.

Krebius ignored him. He swabbed Carol's arm with alcohol. "Now, Carol. A little prick. And pretty soon you'll relax."

Half an hour passed in dead silence. Carol lay with her head back, a small pulse showing in her throat.

Krebius leaned forward. "How do you feel, Carol?"

"Fine," she said in a leaden voice.

"Good," said Krebius briskly.

"Now, we make our arrangements." He laid her arms in her lap, clamped her head gently between two foam-rubber blocks, wheeled the Opticon close, adjusted it so that the binoculars pressed against her eyes. "There. How does that feel?"

"All right."

"Can you see anything?"

"No."

"Do you want to see?"

There was a pause, as if Carol were groping for several different answers. "Yes. I want to see."

"Is there any reason why you can't see?"

Another pause, longer. "I think there's a face I don't want to see."

"Whose face?"

"I don't know his name."

"Now, Carol," said Dr. Krebius, "let's go back five years. Where were you?"

"I was living in Beverly Hills with Mother. I was going to junior high school."

"You could see?"

"Oh yes."

Krebius pressed a switch; the Opticon began to hum and click. Aiken recognized the sound of film winding past a shutter. Krebius reached to the wall, turned out the

lights. A faint neon night-light glowed ruby-red beside Martinon. The room was nearly pitch dark.

Krebius said gently, "Do you remember when you went to the lodge by Holly Lake, up in the Sierras?"

Carol hesitated. "Yes. I remember." She seemed to go gradually rigid. Even in the dark Aiken could sense her hands tightening on the arms.

"Don't be frightened, Carol," said Krebius. "No one will hurt you. Tell us what happened?"

"I don't remember very well."

"What happened, Carol?"

The tension began to build up. Everyone in the room felt it. Krebius' voice was sharper; Martinon had stopped smiling.

Carol spoke in a low voice. "Mother was desperate. Her last picture was a flop. The studios wouldn't take up her option . . . She was drinking."

"What happened the night of the thunderstorm?"

A pause of five seconds. The chair creaked where Martinon leaned forward.

Carol's voice was a husky whisper. "Mother had a friend visiting her. Her lover. I never knew his name. They were in the kitchen mixing drinks and laughing . . . My father drove up . . . I loved my father; I wanted to stay with him, but the court gave me to Mother . . . Outside it was thundering. The wind howled—first loud, then it died alto-

gether. And the clouds came in very low, thick and wet. You could feel them pressing down."

Martinon said, "You're scaring the poor kid to death!"

"Shut up!" Aiken said softly.

"Go on," said Krebius. "Go on, Carol. Tell us. Get it off your chest. Then you can see. Once you look the truth in the face."

Carol's voice began to rise. "Daddy walked in. I talked with him, told him what I had seen. He was very angry. Mother came out laughing, staggering. Daddy said he was going to take me away, that Mother wasn't fit to keep me. Then he saw Mother's lover." Carol was wailing now, in grief and terror. "Outside was lightning. And the lights went out." She screamed. "He shot Daddy. I saw him during the lightning flashes. And then—there was the most terrible sound. The whole world exploded . . ." Her voice rasped, she panted. "And the flash of lightning—right in my eyes . . ."

Was it Aiken's imagination? Or did he see white light flicker from Carol's eyes? Carol had sagged. She was inert.

Krebius rose to his feet. "Phew!" he muttered, "that is awful. All this time she carries knowledge deep in her little head—her father murdered before her eyes!"

"And goes blind, so she won't have to look at her mother's face," said Aiken.

Martinon said, "Aren't you jump-

ing to conclusions? Maybe the lightning made her blind. Maybe she'll always be blind."

"We'll soon find out," said Aiken. He felt Carol's forehead; it was hot and damp with sweat; the hair clung to his fingers.

Krebius turned the lights on dim.

Martinon went over to the Opticon. "In any event, it's an interesting session. I'll develop this film; I'd like to see what's on it."

"No," said Aiken suddenly. "You keep away from those films."

"Why should I?" Martinon asked. "They're films which I've provided for this machine. My films!"

"They're evidence," said Aiken. "Bannister never killed himself. You heard what Carol said. He was murdered. The man's face is on that film."

"Yes," said Krebius, "I'd better take charge of the film, Victor."

"I hate to insist," said Martinon. "But they're my films. You can see them whenever they're developed." He busied himself at the Opticon.

Aiken came forward. "I also hate to insist, Martinon. But I want these films. I'm anxious to see who that lover was."

"Keep your distance," said Martinon levelly.

Aiken pushed him away from the Opticon. The film came with Martinon; the roll clattered to the floor, unwound in lazy coils.

Martinon said, "Now you'll never see the man's face!"

Aiken could no longer bear Martinon's look of complacent self-possession. He aimed a punch at the neat gray mustache. Martinon blocked it expertly, struck Back, set Aiken sprawling among the coils of film.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" cried Krebius. "We must act like gentlemen!"

Aiken rose to his knees, crouched, butted Martinon, who staggered across the room, flung his arms out against the wall to catch himself. At this moment Carol's eyes opened, and Victor was right in front of her.

She stared into Martinon's face and screamed, a hoarse, cracked cry of fear. She struggled to escape from the chair, but the rubber blocks held her head in place. She was pointing at Martinon.

"I know you. I know your face! You shot my father!"

"Well," said Martinon, "this is a pretty pickle. I've got a nasty job here." He reached into his pocket and came out with a pocket-knife. He gave it a switch, the blade snapped out. He strode toward Carol.

"Martinon!" cried Aiken. "You're crazy!" He pushed the Opticon; it toppled into Martinon, crashed over on top of him. Aiken stepped on his wrist; the knife clattered over the floor. Aiken grabbed the knot of Martinon's tie, twisted, ground his knuckles into the jugular, banged Martinon's head on the floor.

Presently Martinon lay still. Aiken released him. "Call the cops." He got to his feet. Martinon rolled over, groaned, lay limp.

Krebius ran out into the hall. Aiken turned, looked at Carol. She was crouched, her legs drawn up on the chair, her eyes wide.

Aiken said, "Hello, Carol. You can see, can't you?"

"Yes. I can see."

"Do you know me?"

"Of course, you're James Aiken."

"Lots of excitement for a while."

"Who's that?" she whispered, looking at the man on the floor. "Is it—Victor?"

"Yes."

"All this time he's worked on me . . ." Her lids fell shut. "I'm so sleepy and tired . . ."

"Don't go to sleep yet."

"I won't . . ."

A squad car squealed to a stop outside the door, and Victor Martinon was taken away.

In Krebius' office Carol drank black coffee. "Now I don't want to go to sleep. I'm afraid I might wake up blind."

"No," said Aiken. "You never will again. Because the spell is broken. Vasillissa is free again."

"Magic!" said Carol. She looked at him smiling. And she was the real Vasillissa, as gay and clever and daring as ever had been the enchanted princess. She reached out, took his hand.

"Magic," said Aiken. "Magic." • •

(Continued from page 6)

tional shot-put, javelin, broad-jump or pole-vault record. This is the theory of some British scientists who currently are looking into the matter at the National Physical Laboratory near London.

A 200-pound athlete at the North Pole would weigh 199 pounds at the equator. A shot weighing sixteen pounds at the Pole would weigh  $1/200$  less at the equator, or 15.92 pounds—a loss of 1.28 ounces. This is because the earth bulges at its middle. Centrifugal force, which tends to sling things off the earth, also is stronger at the equator. The theory holds that the "weaker" gravity nearer the equator will permit an athlete to jump slightly farther, to hurl the discus a few inches more or to vault a bit higher. But this would affect all the contestants' performances.

Since Melbourne, site of the 1956 Olympics, is about 22 degrees closer to the equator than Helsinki, site of the 1952 games, British scientists are predicting that many records set in 1952 at Helsinki will be broken in '56, "provided athletes make exactly the same efforts and that all other conditions, excepting the site, remain unchanged."

• •

**G**IANT spiders that walk on water, glowing fungi that grow on river banks and serve as guides to those who travel the jungle at night, and tiny crickets that

live underwater are among the unusual things found on Kusaie, an island south of the atomic atolls, Eniwetok and Bikini. These weird things were reported by J. F. Gates Clarke, U. S. Department of Agriculture entomologist now working at the U. S. National Museum, Smithsonian Institution. He collected between 50,000 and 60,000 specimens there. Between 800 and 900 distinct species have already been found by scientists now studying Clarke's collection.

One of the strange creatures Mr. Clarke found is a giant spider, grayish-brown and four inches long, which wears "rubbers." These are bristle groupings on his feet which let him run swiftly over the surface of the jungle streams, probably without even getting his feet wet.

A ghostly blue-white light marks the banks of the rivers of Kusaie. The faint light is caused by an unidentified fungus. Mr. Clarke reports wading with his native guide through neck-deep streams in the jungle at night. Always on both sides of the stream was the glow of the fungi to guide them.

Living on rocks in, and along side of, the streams were black crickets about an inch long. The insects, almost invisible in the dim jungle light, chirp continuously. When frightened, the crickets dove into the streams and swam underwater where they cannot be seen.

Walking-sticks, seven to nine



inches long with two-inch legs, were found in the trees. These blue-green insects walk in a hand-over-hand fashion.

Only one type of tick and three varieties of butterfly were discovered on the island. The majority of insects were found to be harmless to man or animals because they feed on dead or decaying vegetable matter. In fact, none of the animals inhabiting Kusaie caused Mr. Clarke much trouble. The great danger came in climbing over the slippery, steep terrain of the volcanic isle.

●   ●

The President in the White House and high military officials in the Pentagon will be able some day to watch on television the actual progress of battles as they occur in far-off corners of the earth.

This was indicated during a demonstration at Fort Meade, Maryland, of combat television that has been developed by the U. S. Army Signal Corps and the Radio Corporation of America. All combat TV needs today to bring battle progress into the strategic command centers and the nation's capital is a method of carrying TV signals across the ocean and the electronics industry is working on that. Thus, large scale invasions or A-bomb or H-bomb strikes may be watched during the instant they are happening. As a result of what appears on the TV screen in the Pentagon or the White House, plans can be changed.

For the demonstration of combat TV the Third Armored Cavalry Regiment staged a river crossing and hill assault under mock combat conditions. Seven hand-carried TV cameras, one mounted in an Army plane and another on an amphibious assault craft, actually went into battle with the troops. They brought to the battle commander's post instant pictures of what was going on. These allowed him to redirect his troops and order additional artillery fire as needed. He interviewed a captured "prisoner" through the medium of TV and thus gathered valuable information about the "enemy."

●   ●

A chemical that affects nerves, heart and blood vessels has been extracted from a sleep-inducing snuff used by West Indian witch doctors at the time of Columbus.

The snuff is called cohoba. It comes from the seeds of a mimosa-like tree, *Piptadenia peregrina*. But the active chemical in it is bufotenine, Dr. Verner L. Stromberg of the National Heart Institute here has discovered. Bufotenine is much like a chemical obtained from the venom of tropical toads. Its effect is something like that of the naturally occurring chemical, serotonin, which constricts blood vessels and speeds the heart rate.

●   ●

Men were creating and treasuring portraits of their loved ones before they learned to make pottery dishes.

Archaeologists have discovered a jumbled heap of such portraits in the ruins of the ancient city of Jericho, left there by the makers some 3,500 years before Joshua brought the walls tumbling down. The people who created the portrait heads lived in the New Stone Age, probably 6,000 years before Christ.

The human skull itself was used by the prehistoric artist as a base for the portrait, which was modeled in plaster. The features were reproduced "with extraordinary fidelity and a high degree of artistic skill," reports Dr. Kathleen M. Kenyon, director of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem. "One feels one is actually looking at the faces of men who died some seven thousand years ago."

The suggestion that the skull heads were family portraits comes to archaeologists from a modern parallel in New Guinea. There, the people make similar portraits from skulls. In some cases the skulls are those of venerated ancestors, in others the heads of enemies.

"The Jericho heads," Dr. Kenyon tells us, "may have had one of these purposes, and the care given to the modeling suggests that they were ancestors rather than enemies."

No pottery was found in the level where the heads were discovered. Evidently the people of the day had not yet learned to make dishes.

Eels make "putt putt" sounds,

striped bass go "thump," and sea-horses click. And with a purpose, too. The concept of the undersea world as a noisy place has received added support from studies conducted by Mrs. Marie Poland Fish, research biological oceanographer of the University of Rhode Island's Narragansett Marine Laboratory.

The researcher used a hydrophone and a sound recorder to eavesdrop on sixty coastal fishes. Only six uttered no sounds.

Mrs. Fish found that fish, like humans, use sounds to "talk" to one another, express fright, comment on changes in their surroundings, or just make noise. Air bladders or friction of one part of the body against another were the noise makers of 27 kinds of fish examined.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This scientist's name is really Fish.)

Thirteen more sources of radio waves in outer space are reported discovered by the U. S. Naval Research Laboratory radio antenna "dish" in Washington, D. C.

The points in the heavens that give off the 9.4 centimeter radio waves detected are identified with nebulae of ionized hydrogen gas in at least eleven cases. In all twenty-four radio "stars" or sources are now listed as detected at 9.4cm wavelength. One of these was spotted when the rotation of the earth allowed the antenna to scan the plane of our galaxy.

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